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LECTURES

ADDRESSED

TO

THE YOUNG MEN

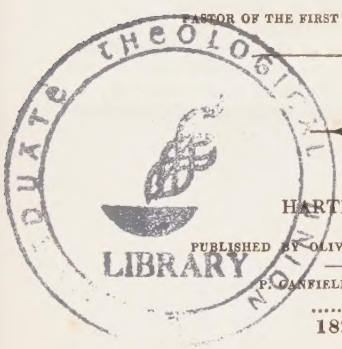
OF

HARTFORD AND NEW-HAVEN,

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR UNITED REQUEST.

BY JOEL HAWES,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN HARTFORD.



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DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT, SS.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twenty-first day of March, in the fifty-second year of the Independence of the United States of America, Joel Hawes, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as author, in the words following, to wit:—"Lectures, addressed to the Young Men of Hartford and New-Haven, and published at their united request. By Joel Hawes, Pastor of the first Church in Hartford." In conformity to the act of Congress of the United States, entitled, "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned."—And also to the act, entitled, "An act supplementary to an act, entitled 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned,' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

L. S.

CHARLES A. INGERSOLL,
Clerk of the District of Connecticut.

A true copy of Record, examined and sealed by me,

CHARLES A. INGERSOLL,
Clerk of the District of Connecticut.

2093

These Lectures, originally designed for this city, and subsequently preached in New-Haven, by special desire of several clergymen of that place, are affectionately inscribed to the Young Gentlemen who attended their delivery, and at whose united request they are now published; with the fervent prayer of the author, that they may contribute to the virtue, respectability and happiness of those, in whose present and future welfare he feels the warmest interest.

Hartford, April, 1828.

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LECTURE I.

CLAIMS OF SOCIETY ON YOUNG MEN.

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1 JOHN, ii. 14.

I HAVE WRITTEN UNTO YOU, YOUNG MEN, BECAUSE YE ARE STRONG.

When Cataline attempted to overthrow the liberties of Rome, he began by corrupting the young men of the city, and forming them for deeds of daring and crime. In this, he acted with keen discernment of what constitutes the strength and safety of a community—*the virtue and intelligence of its youth—especially, of its young men.* This class of persons, has, with much propriety, been denominated the flower of a country—the rising hope of the church and society. Whilst *they* are preserved uncorrupted, and come forward with enlightened minds and good morals, to act their respective parts on the stage of life, the foundations of social order and happiness are secure, and no weapon formed against the safety of the community can prosper.

This, indeed, is a truth so obvious, that all wise and benevolent men, whether statesmen, philanthropists, or ministers of religion, have always felt a deep and peculiar interest in this class of society; and in all attempts to produce reformation and advance human happiness, the young, and particularly young men, have engaged their first and chief regards.

How entirely this accords with the spirit of inspiration, it is needless to remark. Hardly any one trait of the Bible is more prominent than its benevolent concern for the youthful generations of men. On them its instructions drop as the rain and distil as the dew; around their path, it pours its purest light and sweetest promises; and by every motive of kindness and entreaty, of invitation and warning, aims to form them for duty and happiness, for holiness and God.

It is, I trust, in the spirit of these sentiments, that I propose, in this and some following discourses, to address myself directly to the young men of this community. I feel that in doing so, I attempt a service for a most interesting portion of society; and while I shall aim, as is meet, to use great plainness of speech, I beg you, my friends,

to do me the justice to believe, that not a word or sentiment will be uttered, but with the sincerest desire for your present and everlasting happiness.

The subject proposed for present consideration, is the claims of society on young men. In illustrating this subject, I *shall explain the nature of these claims—show how you are to be prepared to meet them—and enforce the duty by appropriate motives.*

I. The claims, then, of which we speak, are of the most weighty and serious character. They grow out of those indissoluble relations which you sustain to society ; and those invaluable interests, social, civil and religious, which have come down to us, a most precious inheritance, from our fathers, and which, with all the duties and responsibilities connected with them, are soon to be transferred to your hands and to your keeping. I look forward a few short years and see the aspect of society entirely changed. The venerable fathers, who have borne the heat and burden of the day, are dropping, one after another, into the grave, and soon they will all be gone. Of those too, who are now the acting members of society, some have passed the meridian of life, others are pas-

sing it, and all will soon be going down its decline, to mingle with the generations who have disappeared before them, from this transient scene of action. To a mind, seriously contemplating this mournful fact, it is an inquiry of deep and tender interest;—who are to rise up and fill their places? To whom are to be committed the invaluable interests of this community? Who are to sustain its responsibilities and discharge its duties? You anticipate the answer. It is to you, young men, that these interests are to be committed and these responsibilities transferred. You are fast advancing to fill the places of those, who are as fast retiring to give place to a new generation. You are soon to occupy the houses, and own the property, and fill the offices, and possess the power, and direct the influence that are now in other hands. The various departments of business and trust, the pulpit and the bar, our courts of justice and halls of legislation; our civil, religious and literary institutions; all, in short, that constitutes society and goes to make life useful and happy, are to be in your hands and under your control.

This representation is not made to excite your vanity, but to impress you with a due sense of your

obligations. You cannot take a rational view of the stations to which you are advancing, or of the duties that are coming upon you, without feeling, deeply, your need of high and peculiar qualifications. In committing to you her interests and privileges, society imposes upon you corresponding claims; and demands that you be prepared to fill, with honour and usefulness, the places which you are destined to occupy. She looks to you for future protection and support, and while she opens her arms to welcome you to her high immunities and hopes, she requires of you the cultivation of those virtues, and the attainment of those qualifications, which can alone prepare you for the duties and scenes of future life.

Such then being the claims of society, let us inquire,

II. How you may be prepared to meet them.

1. And first of all, it is demanded that you awake to a *serious consideration* of the duties and prospects before you. I mention this first, because, if a young man cannot be persuaded to consider what he is, and what he is to become in future life, nothing worthy or good, can be expected of him. And, unhappily, this is the character of

too many young men. They cannot be made to think. They seem resolved to live only for the present moment and for present gratification. As if the whole of their existence were comprised in the passing hour, and they had no concern in any future duty or event, they never cast forward a thought to their coming days, nor inquire how they are to fulfil the great end of their being.

Of these gay and thoughtless triflers, society has nothing to expect. They may have their little day of sunshine and pleasure; then they will vanish and be forgotten as if they had never been. This is unworthy the character of a rational being. Man was made for a nobler end than thus to pass away life in mere levity and trifling. He was made for thought and reflection; he was made to serve God and his generation in a life of beneficent action; and he never exercises his faculties more in accordance with the dignity of his nature, than when he considers the end for which he was created, and inquires how he may best fulfil the great purposes of his being. And this, my friends, is an exercise peculiarly appropriate at *your* time of life. Joyous and flattering as the prospect before you may seem, let me tell you, there is much

in it that is fitted to make you serious and thoughtful. You cannot take a just view of your state and prospects, without feeling that you are placed in circumstances of deep and solemn interest. Your Creator has placed you here in the midst of a shifting and transient scene, to sojourn, a little while, as probationers for eternity, then to pass from the stage and be here no more. He has formed you for society, for duty and happiness; and has so connected you with the living beings around you, that they, as well as yourselves, are to feel the good or ill effects of your conduct, long after you shall have gone to render up your account at his bar. How imperious, to beings in such a state, is the duty of consideration! How wise, how all important to inquire,—What am I, and what is my destination in this and the future world? For what end was I created, and for what purpose placed here in the midst of beings like myself? What are the relations which I sustain to those beings and to society? What the duties which I owe to them? How can I be prepared to perform those duties, and how accomplish the great end for which my Creator gave me existence, and placed me in this world of probation

and trial? The man who thinks lightly of such inquiries, or who never brings them home to his own bosom, as matters of direct, personal concern, violates every principle of reason and common prudence. Let me press them upon you, my young friends, as demanding your first and chief attention. They are indeed grave inquiries; and light, trifling minds may reject them because they are so. But they are suggested by the reality of things; and never, without a due consideration of them, can you be qualified for the duties of life, or sustain the responsibilities so soon to come upon you as members of society.

2. Another requisite for meeting the claims of society is *intelligence*, or a careful cultivation of your minds. In despotic governments, where the subject is a mere vassal, and has no part either in making or executing the laws, ignorance is, no doubt, as the advocates of legitimacy claim, an essential qualification of a good citizen. The less he knows of his rights, the more contented he is to be deprived of them; and the less he understands of duty, the more pliable he is as a mere instrument of ambition and power. Not so in this country. Here every man is a public man. He

has an interest in the community, and exerts an important influence over the interests of others. He is a freeman; and this ought always to mean the same thing as an intelligent man. He possesses the right of suffrage; and in the exercise of that right, he is often called to aid in the election of rulers; to deliberate and act respecting the public welfare, to fill offices of influence and trust, and to perform innumerable duties in the course of life, which can be well performed, only in the possession of an intelligent and well furnished mind. And certainly, whatever be a man's circumstances, he cannot but be a happier and more useful man, by possessing such a mind.

It is not an extended, critical acquaintance with the sciences on which I here insist; this must of necessity be confined to a few; but such a measure of knowledge as may be acquired by men of business, by all men who will but make a proper use of their faculties and time. Franklin was a man of business; he was an apprentice boy in a printing office; but by a careful improvement of that time, which by many young men is thrown away, he became one of the wisest statesmen and most distinguished philosophers of his day. Sherman,

too, of our own State, was a man of business; he was a shoe-maker; but by self-impulse, by patient, untiring effort, he rose from the bench of the shoe-maker, seated himself in the halls of congress, and there took his place with the first.

A small portion of that leisure time, which you all possess, and which, by too many, is given to dissipation and idleness, would enable any young man to acquire a very general knowledge of men and things. A judicious economy of that time, for one year, would afford you opportunity to read a great many useful volumes, and to treasure up much useful knowledge. The means of intellectual improvement were never more abundant or accessible to all classes of persons, than at the present day; and I may add, never were there stronger inducements for young men to avail themselves of those means, and to aim at high attainments in knowledge. Society is rapidly advancing in general improvement; the field of enterprise is fast widening, and useful talents of every kind find ample scope for employment. And permit me to remind you, my friends, that in respect to mental improvement, the present is the most important period of your life. It is, indeed, the

only period in which you can enter upon such a course of improvement with any hope of success. If from the age of fifteen to twenty-five, a young man neglects the cultivation of his mind, he will probably neglect it till the end of life. If during that period he does not form a habit of reading, of observation and reflection, he will never form such a habit; but go through the world, as the dull ass goes to market, none the wiser for all the wonders that are spread around him.

I am the more anxious to impress this subject on your minds, because I consider your usefulness, your present and future happiness, as most intimately connected with it. A young man who has a fondness for books, or a taste for the works of nature and art, is not only preparing to appear with honor and usefulness as a member of society, but is secured from a thousand temptations and evils to which he would otherwise be exposed. He knows what to do with his leisure time. It does not hang heavily on his hands. He has no inducement to resort to bad company; or the haunts of dissipation and vice; he has higher and nobler sources of enjoyment in himself. At pleasure, he can call around him the best of company,—the

wisest and greatest men of every age and country —and feast his mind with the rich stores of knowledge which they spread before him. A lover of good books can never be in want of good society, nor in much danger of seeking enjoyment in the low pleasures of sensuality and vice.

3. Another thing demanded of you by society is *an upright and virtuous character*. If a young man is loose in his principles and habits; if he lives without plan and without object, spending his time in idleness and pleasure, there is more hope of a fool than of him. He is sure to become a worthless character and a pernicious member of society. He forgets his high destination as a rational, immortal being; he degrades himself to a level with the brute; and is not only disqualified for all the serious duties of life, but proves himself a nuisance and a curse to all with whom he is connected.

Every unprincipled, wicked man is an enemy of society. And a virtuous community knows how to punish such characters. They are not respected; they are not patronized; confidence and support are withheld from them; and they are left,

neglected and despised, to float down with the common herd to perdition.

No young man can hope to rise in society, or act worthily his part in life, without a fair, moral character. The basis of such a character is virtuous principle; or a deep, fixed sense of moral obligation, sustained and invigorated by the fear and the love of God. The man who possesses such a character can be trusted. Integrity, truth, benevolence, justice, are not with him words without meaning; he knows and he feels their sacred import, and aims, in the whole tenor of his life, to exemplify the virtues they express. Such a man has decision of character;—he knows what is right and is firm in doing it. Such a man has independence of character;—he thinks and acts for himself, and is not to be made a tool of to serve the purposes of party. Such a man has consistency of character;—he pursues a straight forward course, and what he is to day you are sure of finding him to morrow. Such a man has true worth of character;—and his life is a blessing to himself, to his family, to society and to the world.

Aim then, my friends, to attain this character,—

aim at virtue, and moral excellence. This is the first, the indispensable qualification of a good citizen. It imparts life and strength and beauty, not only to individual character, but to all the institutions and interests of society. It is indeed the dew and the rain that nourish the vine and the fig-tree, by which we are shaded and refreshed.

4. Another thing demanded of you by society is *public spirit.* Every young man should come forward in life with a determination to do all the good he can, and to leave the world the better for his having lived in it. He should consider that he was not made for himself alone ; but for society, for mankind, and for God. He should feel that he is a constituent, responsible member of the great family of man ; and while he should pay particular attention to the wants and the welfare of those with whom he is immediately connected, he should accustom himself to send his thoughts abroad, over the wide field of practical benevolence, and early learn to feel and act for the good of his species.

I say *early*, because if you do not begin in the morning of life, to cherish a public spirit—a spirit of active, enterprising benevolence, you will probably never possess much of it. This is a virtue

that rarely springs up late in life. If it grow and flourish at all, it must be planted in youth, and be nourished by the warm sunshine and rain of the spring season of life. He, who cares only for himself in youth, will be a very niggard in manhood, and a wretched miser in old age.

And consider what a poor, miserable kind of existence it is, to live only to one's self. It is indeed but half living. "Selfishness has been well termed, a starveling vice. It is its own curse. He who does no good, gets none." He who cares not for others, will soon find that others will not care for him. As he lives to himself, so he will die to himself, and no body will miss him, or be sorry that he is gone.*

Guard against this temper, my friends, as most unworthy in itself, and destructive of all respectability and usefulness. Cultivate a spirit of enlarged benevolence,—a generous, self-denying, public spirit, which shall cause you to feel and take an interest in whatever affects the happiness, or conduces to the improvement of your fellow men. Especially is this a duty incumbent on you at the

*James' Christian Father's Present—a precious little volume, and should be read by all young people.

present day. It is a day of action,—of action in the cause of God and human happiness. The young men of this generation are called to a great work. God is fast preparing the way for this world's emancipation from the thraldom and misery, under which it has been groaning for six thousand years; and to those who are now coming upon the stage, does he extend the high privilege and honor of bearing a part in effecting this glorious work. See to it then, that you forfeit not the honor, by acting on the principle of a narrow and contracted selfishness. Cherish that noble, that disinterested, that rare patriotism, which will make you prefer the public interest to your own;—your country's prosperity and glory to your own honor and emolument. It is in this spirit alone, that you can prove yourselves the worthy descendants of the pilgrims, or preserve those precious institutions and privileges, which you inherit from their labors and prayers. No one trait in their character was more marked than their public spirit. They labored, not for themselves, but for mankind; not for time, but for eternity. It was this that led them to forsake their own green fields for these then inhospitable shores. It was this that

induced them to lay broad and deep the foundation of those civil, literary and religious institutions, which are the glory and defence of our land. While, then, you have the honor of descending from those illustrious men, distinguished alike for their love of country, and their love of God, aspire to tread in their steps and imitate their virtues,—living not for yourselves, but for society ; not for the present moment, but for all future time and for eternity.*

* A word in this connection, to enforce on young men the duty of exerting an influence in favor of religious institutions. With the prosperity of these institutions is identified the prosperity of our country. They were established by our pious ancestors, in the hope that they would be perpetuated to the latest posterity. From them, as from an abundant fountain, have flowed the intelligence, the virtue and good order, which have hitherto blessed this fair portion of our land, and made it as the garden of the Lord ; and on their continuing to be sustained, by a vigorous and healthful public sentiment, depends the continuance of our dearest privileges and hopes.

Every man, then, who loves his country, or wishes well to its best interests, will show himself a decided friend of religious institutions, and honorably bear his part in supporting them.

Particularly, ought young men, as they come forward into life, to *enrol themselves as members of some ecclesiastical society*, and give their steady and united influence in support of the religious interests of the community, where they reside. They ought to do this from a regard to the *public welfare ;* for a young man, not connected with any ecclesiastical socie-

5. To be prepared to meet the claims of society, may I not add, that *personal religion* is indispensably necessary? Is not this the only sure basis of public and private virtue,—the only sufficient support of sound morals and social order? It was the design of God, as it was the prayer of our Fathers, in the settlement of this fair portion of our country, that it should be a religious community. This guided all their counsels, prompted all their efforts, and entered into the very foundation and texture of all their institutions.

Can these institutions then be preserved, or the great end of their establishment secured, if those, who are to sustain them, are destitute of the spirit which forms their strength and their glory? Nay, my friends, be not deceived. You cannot fulfil the great end of your existence, nor perform, in a right and acceptable manner, any of the duties of

ty, will of course feel very little interest in its concerns, and do but little to promote its prosperity.

They ought also to do this, from a regard to their *own respectability and usefulness;* for if they belong to no religious society, they will be very likely to neglect public worship, and all the other duties of religion; and a virtuous community is sure to mark and punish the meanness that is not willing to bear a fair proportion of the expense and care necessary in sustaining the institutions of the Gospel.

life, without true religion. Without this, you are without the first and chief qualification of a good man and a good citizen.

But not to enlarge on this particular, I would only add, that whatever youthful thoughtlessness may dictate, the time is coming when there will be but one opinion on this subject;—when all will be made to feel the supreme importance of religion, both as a qualification for the duties of this life and for the scenes of the eternal world.

III. In glancing at the motives which urge upon you the duty of being prepared to meet the claims of society, it is encouraging to observe,

1. That the qualifications demanded are *entirely within your power.* There is not one of you who cannot awake to a serious consideration of the duties and responsibilities that are soon to be devolved upon you; and this is the first and main thing necessary to your being prepared to sustain them. There is not one of you who cannot become intelligent, virtuous, public spirited and pious; and adorned with these graces, you will be prepared to fill with honor to yourselves and usefulness to society, the various stations to which God in his providence may call you.

2. It is a consideration of great weight, that the claims, of which we have been speaking, are *fixed* upon you, and there is no possibility of escaping from them. God has brought you into being in circumstances of deep and solemn interest. He has cast your lot in the midst of a christian and civilized society, and surrounded you with privileges of a very high and peculiar character. Soon you are to come upon the stage to act the part assigned you,—soon to have committed to you all the various and infinitely important interests of this community. And for the manner in which you sustain these interests, you are held accountable at the bar of your final Judge. In this matter there is no discharge, and there is no neutrality. Whether you shall exist as members of society, and finally give account of your conduct, is not submitted to your choice. This point God has decided. You must exist; you must exist in the midst of society;—burdened with the weighty responsibilities that grow out of the relations you sustain to the living beings around you, and to the generations that are coming after you; and you must take the eternal consequences of living and acting in these deeply interesting circumstances.

Nothing more, one would think, need be said to excite you to a diligent improvement of your talents, and to an untiring, faithful discharge of the duties which you owe to yourselves, to your fellow men and to God.

3. Consider next the *value of the interests* that are soon to be committed to you. Much is said, and most justly, of the happy state of society in which our lot is cast. We may truly say, the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage. It is a heritage which is endeared to us by a thousand tender and sacred associations ; for which our fathers labored and prayed ; for which they lived and died ;—which has been preserved to us through many dangers and conflicts, and at a great expense of treasure and blood. It is a heritage, on which the smiles of heaven have always rested,—which comprises more good with less evil, than is any where else to be found on earth ; which contains, in short, all that is most essential to the perfection and happiness of man, both in this and the future world. Of this inheritance, young men, you are soon to be the guardians and defenders. To all its institutions and blessings, to all its privileges and hopes,

you are the natural heirs, and on you lies the weighty obligation of preserving it entire, for the generation that is to succeed you. If you fail to be qualified for the high trust, or prove unfaithful in the sacred duties which it involves, how fearful the consequences,—how irreparable the loss! It is entirely in your power to turn this garden of the Lord into a desolation; to sweep from it all that is goodly and fair. Let but the rising generation come upon the stage, without intelligence, without virtue, without public spirit, without piety; inconsiderate, dissipated, vicious; and in thirty years, the dismal change would be realized. Yes, my beloved friends, on you it depends, under God, whether this goodly inheritance shall be preserved or destroyed; whether the morals, the religion, the good order and freedom which now so happily prevail in the community, shall be continued, or give place to profligacy, to irreligion and wild misrule.

Your influence is not confined to yourselves, or to the scene of your immediate action; it extends to others, and will reach to succeeding ages. Future generations will feel the effects of your principles and your conduct. You are so

connected with the immortal beings around you, and with those who are to come after you, that you cannot avoid exerting a most important influence over their character and final condition ; and thus, long after you shall be no more, nay, long after the world itself shall be no more, the consequences of your conduct to thousands of your fellow men, will be nothing less than everlasting destruction, or eternal life.

4. While you aim to fulfil the duties which you owe to society, you take the most effectual measures to promote *your own respectability and happiness.* The young man, of inconsideration and thoughtlessness, of gayety and fashion, may shine and sparkle for a little moment ; and during that moment, he may be the admiration, and perhaps envy, of persons as vain and thoughtless as himself. But he soon passes the season of gayety and mirth, and what is he then ? A worthless, neglected cypher in society. His present course of life has no reference to the scenes and duties of riper years. His youth is entirely disconnected from his manhood. It is a portion of his existence which he throws away ; and perhaps worse than throws away, because he contracts habits which

unfit him for sober life, and cleave to him as an enfeebling, disgusting disease all his days.

Beaus and fops, and the whole pleasure loving fraternity, are short lived creatures. They look pretty in the gay sunshine of summer ; but poor things, they cannot endure the approach of autumn and winter. They have their little hour of enjoyment and that is the end of them.

On the other hand, the young man who seriously considers the nature and design of his being; who shuns the society and flees the amusements of the thoughtless and the vicious ; who devotes his vacant hours to the improvement of his mind and heart, and aims at the acquisition of those habits and virtues which may qualify him for the duties of life,—such a young man cannot fail to rise in respectability, in influence and honor.

His virtues and attainments make room for him in society, and draw around him the confidence and respect, the affection and support, of all worthy and good men. The pursuits of his youth bear directly on the enjoyments and usefulness of his manhood. There is no waste of his existence ; no contraction of bad habits to obscure the meridian or darken the decline of life. The course up-

on which he enters, like the path of the just, shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. This motive, my young friends, you cannot duly consider without feeling its constraining influence. You are all in the pursuit of happiness; you all desire the esteem and respect of your fellow men. Here is the way, and the only way to attain it. An enlightened mind, a virtuous character, a useful life; —these are the dignity and the glory of man. They make him lovely in the sight of angels and God; and secure for him present peace and everlasting happiness.

5. Consider again, how pleasant will be the *retrospect of past life*, if you faithfully serve God and your generation according to his will. It is but a little time, before you, who are young, will be looking upon a generation rising up to take your places, just as the fathers are now looking upon you. You will soon pass the meridian of life, and be going down its decline to the invisible world. Consider that time as come, as present. Think of yourselves as retiring from the scene of action; your heads whitened with the snows of age, and your limbs stiffened with the frosts of winter. O, how cheering to be able now, to look

back upon a life of beneficent and useful action; a life spent in the service of God and for the good of mankind? How pleasant and consoling to reflect, that you have done your duty as members of society, and have sustained, honorably, the great interests that were committed to you? How animating too the prospect before you,—how glorious the anticipations of the future? All the great interests of society safe; all its institutions secure and flourishing; a generation rising up under the influence of your example and training, intelligent, virtuous, enterprising; prepared to fill your places and carry on the system of human affairs. To them you commend all that you hold most dear on earth,—the high interests of the church and society,—happy in the assurance, that they will sustain the sacred trust and transmit the precious inheritance entire, to those who shall come after them. To a mind gladdened with such reflections and prospects, how bright and benignant shines the sun of declining life? The shades of evening gather around him in peace; he reposes in joyful hope, and all his powers are invigorated and cheered by the delightful visions that burst upon his view.

And now, in view of the whole, may I not hope, that ere you rise from your seats, and in every future emergency of life, prompted by the warm impulse of duty, you will raise to Heaven the expressive prayer,

"Father of light and life! Thou Good Supreme!
O teach me what is good! Teach me Thyself!
Save me from folly, vanity and vice,
From every low pursuit! And feed my soul
With knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure;
Sacred, substantial, never fading bliss!"

LECTURE II.

DANGERS OF YOUNG MEN.

TITUS, ii. 6.

YOUNG MEN LIKEWISE EXHORT TO BE SOBER MINDED.

"Secretary Walsingham, an eminent courtier and statesman, in Queen Elizabeth's time, in his old age, retired into a rural privacy. Some of his former, gay companions came to visit him, who observed, he was melancholy. No, said he, I am not melancholy; I am serious; and it is very proper I should be so. Ah, my friends, while we laugh, all things are serious round about us. God is serious, who exercises patience towards us; Christ is serious, who shed his atoning blood for us; the Holy Ghost is serious in striving against the obstinacy of our hearts; the Holy Scriptures are serious books;—they present to our thoughts the most important concerns in all the world; the holy sacrament represents the most serious and awful matters; the whole creation is serious in serving

God and us; all who are in hell are serious; how then can *we* be gay, and trifle with all-important time."

Admirable reply, and worthy to be engraven on the tablet of every heart. It marks an obvious distinction between melancholy and seriousness; and whilst it administers a pertinent reproof to "this world's gay triflers," it indicates a frame of mind which it becomes *all persons* habitually to cherish. For, whatever view we take of our condition and prospects, we cannot but see, there is much to enforce the exhortation of the text; much to make us

> "Walk thoughtful, on the silent, solemn shore,
> Of that vast ocean we must sail so soon."

Human life is often likened to a voyage. It is a voyage to eternity; attended with great danger, as well as much hardship and toil. The sea we have to navigate, viewed in prospect, looks smooth and inviting; but beneath, it conceals shoals and quicksands and rocks; and great multitudes, in attempting to reach the distant shore, are shipwrecked and lost. On this sea, my young friends, you are now embarking, with little knowledge of what is before you, and many of you, I fear, without

line, or compass, or chart ;—a sea where many dark nights and furious storms are to be encountered ; where you are liable, on the one hand, to be allured into fatal gulfs ; and on the other, to be dashed upon hidden shelves. Happy, if apprised of the dangers that threaten you, you betake yourselves to the means of safety, survive every storm, and arrive secure, at last, in the haven of eternal rest.

To point out these dangers, and suggest the means of guarding against them, is what I shall attempt in the present discourse.

1. Every period of life has its peculiar temptations and dangers. But were I to specify the period which, of all others, is attended with the greatest peril, and most needs to be watched and guarded, I would fix upon that which elapses from fourteen to twenty-one years of age. This, pre-eminently, is the forming, fixing period ; the spring season of disposition and habit ; and it is during this season, more than any other, that the character assumes its permanent shape and color, and the young man is wont to take his course for life and for eternity.

But not to confine my remarks to this particular

age, it will not be doubted, that the time, during which, we usually denominate one *a young man*, is the most important and perilous period of his whole existence. Then the passions, budding and hastening to ripeness, acquire new vigor, become impatient of restraint and eager for gratification. Then the imagination, unchecked by experience and unrestrained by judgment, paints the world in false and fascinating colors, and teaches the young bosom to sigh after its vain and forbidden pleasures. Then springs up in the mind, the restless desire of independence and self-control ;—a disposition to throw off the restraints of parental counsel and authority, and to think and act for itself. "Then the social impulse is felt, and the young man looks around for companions and friends ;" then the calling for life is chosen, the principles of action adopted, habits acquired, and those connexions in business and society formed, which usually decide the character and fix the condition, both for this and the future world.

The present then, young men, is to you, a season of deep and everlasting interest. Consequences of infinite moment hang on the span of time that is now passing over you.

The path to respectability, to usefulness and happiness, is open before you ; so also is the path to infamy and wretchedness and woe. And now the election is to be made. You are now to lay your course for eternity ; to enter upon that path which, in all probability, you will pursue through life, and which will terminate in heaven or in hell. And the chances that you will choose wrong, are greatly against you. Such are the dangers that encompass you, and so little are persons, at your age, aware of them. that there is great reason to ear, you will mistake the road to happiness and neaven, and wander into some one of the ten thousand ways that lead to ruin.

But this is a general view of the subject ; let us descend to a few particulars.

1. In the first place then, young men, for the most part, are but little aware of the danger which attends the *beginnings of evil.* They readily perceive the degrading and destructive tendency of the grosser vices ; but they are slow of heart to believe, that there are certain dispositions and habits, which inevitably lead to those vices and their consequent degradation and ruin. Hence, while they are careful to shun the more open and fla-

grant offences, they are not afraid to venture upon what are deemed little sins,—upon slight deviations from duty,—occasional indulgence of the appetites and passions.

No mistake is more common, or more fatal than this. It is the way in which vice maintains its dominion in our world,—the standing cause of ruin to the character and the souls of men. All vicious habits commence in what are considered ittle sins.

No young man becomes suddenly abandoned and profligate. There is always a gradual progress. He begins in *slight, occasional departures* from rectitude, and goes on, from one degree of guilt to another, till conscience becomes seared, the vicious propensity strong, the habit of indulgence fixed, and the character ruined.

Nothing is more obvious than this connexion between the beginning and the consummation of evil ; and yet, hardly any thing is more difficult, than to convince the young of its reality. In entering upon wrong courses, they have not the least expectation or fear of the dreadful issue. They mean not to proceed beyond the point of safety ; and they have no doubt, they can easily effect an

escape, whenever danger appears; but ere they are aware, they are arrested by the iron grasp of habit, and ruined forever.

Take for example, a young man, who occasionally drinks to excess in the social circle; he does not dream that he is entering upon a course which will probably end in confirmed intemperance. He means no harm; he says of the sin, is it not a little one; there can be no danger in this. But soon his bands are made strong, and he becomes the slave of a sottish vice.

Thus it is with all vicious practices. However slight at first, they tend, by a strong and necessary impulse, to the point of utter depravation of principle, and ruin of character. There is no safety but in guarding against the first approaches of evil. To step upon forbidden ground is to throw one's self into the power of the destroyer; and if God interpose not to deliver, ruin is inevitable. It was a wise saying, among the ancients, that the way of vice lies down hill. If you take but a few steps, the motion soon becomes so impetuous and violent, that it is impossible for you to resist it.

2. Another danger, to which young men are exposed, arises from the want of *firmness and inde-*

pendence of character. They have not a due sense of their individual responsibility; and are too apt to yield to the practices and opinions of others, in opposition to their own convictions of duty. They imagine, that their respectability and success in life, depend on being on good terms, with those of the same age and standing with themselves. This leads them to accommodate themselves to their habits, to their modes of thinking and acting, and to their errors and vices. They dread the thought of being singular. They cannot bear the ridicule of companions, nor gather courage enough to say, *no*, to those associates who would draw them into a fellowship with themselves, in dissipation and vice. Many a young man has, in this way, fallen to rise no more. He yielded to the solicitations of a sinful companion, not because he approved of them, but because he did not dare to resist them. He went with him into the ways of evil, not because he was pleased with them, but because he had not courage to turn his back on his seducer, or incur the sneers of an unprincipled associate.

This is an evil, the extent of which, cannot well be estimated. Every season, great numbers of youth come from the country, to our larger towns

and cities, to engage in the various departments of business and trade. Many of them are from christian families, and bring with them the loveliness of a fair, unsullied character. But they know little of the world,—little of the temptations and vices to which they are exposed in their new place of residence. Drawn, as they soon are, into fellowship with those who have gone there before them, and accustomed, as they are, to look up to them as their superiors, they naturally conform to their habits and practices, and fall an easy prey to the corrupt and corrupting examples by which they are surrounded. They have not firmness to resist the enticements of depraved companions. The consequence is, they fall in with the mass of corruption around them, and go to swell the monstrous tide of depravity and dissipation, which is rolling, as a mighty desolation, over the cities of our land.

I have here touched upon a topic which deserves a much more careful consideration than I can now give it,—I mean the pernicious influence of bad company. Of all the causes which operate to undermine the principles and ruin the char-

acters of young men, this, I have long been satisfied, is the most fatal.

We are all, says Mr. Locke, a kind of chameleons, who take a tincture from the objects which surround us. And a greater than he has said; He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

We are, by the very constitution of our nature, creatures of imitation. We instinctively and necessarily catch the spirit, and copy the manners, and imitate the practices, of those with whom we associate. Show me the company you keep, and I will tell you your character, is an old adage; and it is verified by universal observation. This principle of our nature is capable of being turned to the most valuable purposes. By associating with the virtuous, the wise and the good, we bring to bear on ourselves, a most powerful influence of assimilation. All our good principles and good traits are strengthened and improved; and we feel ourselves advancing, daily, in all that is worthy and excellent.

On the other hand, if we associate with the immoral and the unprincipled, we come under an influence which cannot fail to injure us. We shall

soon be like them. "If we do not carry to them a similarity of taste, we shall be sure to acquire it."

And let me say to you, my friends, it is not the low and the dissipated, the vulgar and the profane, from whose example and society you are most in danger. These, every young man, who has *any* sense of character, will of course, despise and shun. But there are persons of decent morals, of polished manners, and interesting talents, but who, at the same time, are unprincipled and wicked; who make light of sacred things, scoff at religion, and deride the suggestions and scruples of a tender conscience as superstition,—these are the persons whose society and influence are most to be feared. Their breath is pollution, their embrace death. And unhappily, in every large and populous place, there are many of this description. They mark out their unwary victims; they gradually draw them into their toils; they strike the deadly fang; infuse the poison; and exult to see youthful virtue and parental hope, "wither and expire under their ruffian example." Many a young man has thus been led on by his elders in iniquity, till he has been initiated into all the mysteries of debauche-

ry and crime, and ended his days, a poor, outcast wretch.

Nor can it be doubted, that, of all who shall finally make their bed in hell, *they* will have the lowest place, who, not satisfied with being wicked themselves, labor to diffuse the poison of their principles, and lure unguarded youth to the gates of death. To say of any one, "*he is a corrupter of youth*," is to give him the worst possible character,—it is to mark him a fiend in human form; and on him will fall the darkest frown of God's wrath.

3. Another danger, to which young men are eminently exposed, is *an excessive worldliness*. This is especially true of the young men of this country, and of the present day. Here are no hereditary titles, no honors, and no entailed estates, descending from father to son. All are born equal, and are alike left to make their way in the world by their own exertions. Wealth confers the principal distinction. Men are deemed happy and honorable according to their wealth. And as the field of enterprise is unbounded, all set out with a determination that they will get wealth. This is the great object that fills the eye, and fires the

heart, and engrosses the thoughts, and employs the hands, and occupies the time, to the almost entire exclusion of other subjects. The consequence is the formation of a thoroughly worldly character; than which, so far as religion, and eternity, and God, are concerned, a more hopeless character cannot be conceived. Concerning persons of this description, our Lord Jesus Christ declared; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for them to enter the kingdom of heaven. Their habits are all of the earth, earthy; and it is well, if in the process of rising in the world, as it is called, they have not made shipwreck of a good conscience, and fallen into those foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

Take an example. Here is a young man just commencing business. His object is a very laudable one, to obtain a competency for himself and family; and he purposes to pursue it, by fair and laudable means. By degrees, his business grows on his hands, and demands a larger share of his time and attention. He is successful in his plans; and wealth pours in upon him, in unexpected abundance. But this, so far from satisfying, only

wakes up new desires, and prompts to new efforts. He begins to plan and act on a larger scale, and looks, with eager expectation, for larger profits. As he extends his connexions, and enters into new arrangements, his cares multiply, and his business exerts over him a more and more absorbing influence. At every step, his thirst after wealth increases. The world fixes a stronger and stronger grasp on his affections, and plunges him, deeper and deeper, in its bewildering concerns. At length he finds no time, or inclination to attend to any thing else. He has become a thoroughly worldly minded man. He feels, and thinks, and talks, about nothing but the world. This is the idol of his heart,—the god of his daily worship. And now just trace the evils of this process, which has formed him an idolater and cut him off from heaven. Conscience is laid asleep; moral principle is prostrated; the intellect and the heart shrivelled up to the little dimensions of dollars and cents; the Sabbath, and the Bible, and the soul neglected; and God and eternity, hardly more thought of, than if they did not exist.

This is no ideal character. It is realized in the case of great multitudes of young men. In their

study and strife to get rich, they are ruined forever. The result, in thousands of instances, is the destruction of morals and happiness ; the formation of a low and worthless character; and utter abandonment of God, to the curse of confirmed impenitence, and the misery of unpardoned guilt.

4. Another danger to which young men are exposed, arises from their proneness to *scepticism and unbelief.* It is an unquestionable fact, that " the natural bias of youth is almost always towards scepticism or infidelity. And such is the case, not merely because, as Bacon says, a little philosophy inclines us to atheism, and a great deal of philosophy carries us back to religion ; but youth has an *intellectual* bias against religion, because it would humble the arrogance of the understanding ; and a *moral* bias against it, because it would check the self-indulgence of the passions."* This is especially true of young men, in the incipient stages of education. They have a strong bias in favor of infidelity, because it seems to emancipate the mind from superstition and prejudice ; and because it lays few restraints upon the gratification of the desires.

*British Critic.

I might mention many facts in proof of this. I don't believe the Bible, said a little boy, not ten years old, and brought up, in a christian family, in this city ; I don't believe the Bible, said he to his little associates, looking very wise and big. What principle was at work here ? The same, precisely, that made Voltaire, and Hume, and Paine, infidels. It was the workings of a depraved heart,—the natural aversion of the mind to the duties and restraints of religion.

When Dr. Dwight entered upon the presidency of Yale College, a considerable proportion of the students, it is said, were infidels; and so proud were they of the distinction, that they assumed the names of the principal English and French infidels, and were more familiarly known by them, than by their own.*

Now the infidelity of these young men was not the result of a careful examination of the subject ; for they were profoundly ignorant of it ;—as was proved by the fact, that in the first discussion of the subject, by the President, they became ashamed of their principles and renounced them ;—but from that natural bias against religion, which, we

* Dwight's Life, p. 26.

say, is characteristic of young and inexperienced minds. It was the mere overflowings of pride and self-conceit; and this is the source whence it always springs.

There are some young men in this city, we are told, who affect to be infidels;—mere striplings in age, and mere dolts in knowledge;—and there are many, we know, who have very loose and sceptical views of the doctrines of the Bible. But if these persons would only search for the origin of their sentiments, they would find that they spring from a cause, which is as great a reproach to their understandings, as it is to their hearts. They have never taken pains to examine the subject; they are grossly ignorant of it; and they are sceptical and unbelieving just because they *are* ignorant of it, and do not like that their appetites and passions should come under the restraints of religion.

My friends, let me exhort you to be on your guard against this evil bias of the heart. Form your views of religion not from indolence, not from prejudice, not from the failings of its professors; but from the decisions of an enlightened conscience, and an intelligent study of the Bible.

This sacred book comes to you as a revelation from God; and its divine origin is sustained by the most ample evidence. Open your minds to that evidence, and you can never have a doubt of the correctness of its claims, nor of the truth of its essential doctrines. The Gospel may be neglected, but it cannot be understandingly disbelieved. It may be despised, but it cannot be overturned. It is an edifice built upon a rock. Its foundation is the truth of God; and it will stand forever, firm and immoveable, as the throne of the Eternal.

On this foundation, my young friends, it is your chief duty and highest interest, to build your immortal hopes. And yet there is great reason to fear, you will neglect to do it. This is, indeed, the greatest danger to which you are exposed. It is, that in the health and joyousness of youth; it is, that amidst the pleasures and pursuits of the world; it is, that in the unbelief and aversion of the heart to religion, you will neglect its claims, adopt false views of its doctrines, procrastinate the concerns of the soul, and finally fail of eternal life. Here is not the place to enlarge on this subject. I will only add, that as God has created you rational beings, and destined you to an immor-

tal existence ; so you are bound to his service by obligations, from which you can never escape. They will abide upon you through life, and forever ; and in whatever part of the universe you may be placed, you will eternally feel the consequences of obedience or disobedience, to the laws of your Creator. While then you recollect that you are to survive all the changes of time, and exist forever, do not forget, that the immortal spirit, which God has given you, will soon rise to a state of ineffable glory and blessedness, or sink amid the darkness and wailings of endless despair.

II. Time will allow me only to glance at the second branch of our subject ;—the means of guarding against the dangers that have been mentioned.

1. In the first place then, bring strongly before your minds the deep, personal interest you have, in keeping yourselves secure from the evils that threaten you. Recollect your high destination, as rational and immortal beings, and remember, that your all, both for this, and the future world, depends on the manner in which you demean yourselves in this state of your probation. If, during the few years in which your characters are

forming, you shun the paths of vice, and carefully cultivate habits of virtue, intelligence and good conduct; you cannot fail to rise to respectability, and usefulness, and happiness. You will have the sweet approbation of your own minds to cheer and animate you; friends will rise up to patronise and encourage you; providence will smile upon your efforts and ways; and your life, crowned with the blessing of God and the gratitude of your fellow men, will decline in peace, and give a fair promise of a bright rising in another world. Remember, my young friends, that all this depends on a few short years; upon this vernal season of habit and character; upon the very hours that are now flitting by you. Improve these aright, and you are made forever,—misimprove them, and you are undone forever.

If you now live without plan and without order, neglectful of the mind and the heart, and given to loose and vicious practices, the consequences *will* follow. You cannot avert them. You sow to the flesh, and of the flesh, you shall reap corruption.—Loss of peace of mind—loss of self-respect —loss of the respect of others—loss of success in life—disappointment and sorrow to friends, and

everlasting shame to yourselves;—these are the fruits of a mis-spent and vicious youth. Consider then, my friends, that the way to honor, to usefulness, and heaven, is open before you; and also the way to shame, to worthlessness and hell; and in view of all consequences, come to a determination which course you will pursue.

2. Beware of *the beginnings of evil.* Here is your chief danger. It lies in venturing upon little indulgences and sins; upon slight violations of conscience and duty. These are the germs of bad habits and ruined characters. If once allowed to take root within you,—to spring up and bud,—they will assuredly shed over your future years, the bitter fruits of sorrow and shame. Shun then the very appearance of evil. Venture not a step on forbidden ground. The moment you do, you have lost the shield of your safety, and are in the power of the destroyer. Have no fellowship with bad company. The man who would draw you into sinful indulgences, or attempt to undermine your principles and your virtue, regard as the enemy of your soul, and avoid him as you would a fiend from the pit. Aim in all things, to have a conscience void of offence toward God and to-

ward man. Nothing is so essential to your safety as a *tender, faithful conscience;* and such a conscience you can maintain, only by yielding implicit obedience to its dictates. Resolve then never to violate the principles of reason and virtue. Keep close in the path of duty. It is the only path of safety, of honor and happiness.

3. Always have an *object in view; and let your aim in life be elevated.* Here young men are extremely apt to fail. They have no settled plan of life; no high, commanding purpose, impelling to worthy action. The consequence is, they are fickle of purpose; unsteady in conduct; open to the assaults of temptation, and easily drawn into vicious courses.

No young man can long be safe in his principles and habits, or be at all distinguished in the world, without the *sustaining and inspiriting* influence of a high and worthy object of pursuit. This is the great secret of effort and eminence. It is also the great secret of a safe passage through this evil and tempting world. He who has a worthy object before him, and is determined to obtain it, is not to be diverted by the low pleasures of sense and vice. He is on his watch tower, girt for action; his

heart is intent upon the prize before him ; his eye is fixed upon it ; and whatever temptations assail, or difficulties obstruct, he rises above them and presses onward to the goal.

An high standard ; an elevated aim,—this is the safeguard of character and the main spring of excellence. This makes the skilful mechanic ; the enterprising merchant ; the useful citizen ; the learned jurist ; the eloquent orator ; the wise statesman.

It was the grand conception of eloquence which perpetually revolved in the mind of Cicero,—"that idea, of *aliquid immensum infinitumque, of something great and noble*, which always haunted his thoughts,"—that drew forth those splendid displays of genius which the world continues to admire, but cannot rival.

I have often been struck with a passage in the life of Lord Nelson. There was a time in his youthful days when he was on the point of yielding to despondency. "I felt impressed, said he, with a feeling, that I should never rise in my profession. At length a sudden glow of patriotism was kindled in my bosom, and presented my king and country as my patron. Well then, I ex-

claimed, I will be a hero. From that time a radiant orb, as he expressed it, was suspended in his mind's eye, which urged him onward to honor and renown."

Think, my young friends, that God and your country are *your* patrons; and aspire not to be heroes, but men;—not to win an earthly crown, but to attain the true dignity and worth of immortal beings.

4. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.* This is the command of God; and were I to comprise all my directions to you in one, it should be this. Nothing furnishes so sure a protection against the allurements of the world; nothing tends so much to invigorate private virtue, and diffuse, around, a healthful, public sentiment, as a serious observance of the Lord's day. No young man, who habitually keeps this day, is in much danger of having his principles undermined, or his morals corrupted. There is something in the very act of ceasing from worldly occupations on this holy day, and repairing with the people of God, to worship him in the sanctuary, which wonderfully tends to form and strengthen all good habits, and to adorn

the character with the charms of a fair and lovely virtue.

If there were nothing beyond the grave, and no motive for keeping the Sabbath, but your prosperity in this life, you would be unspeakable losers not to keep it. No habitual Sabbath breaker can be permanently prospered. He has thrown away the greatest safeguard of virtue and happiness, and is constantly exposed to fall into those habits and vices, which will ruin him, both for this world and that which is to come.

Lord Chief Justice Hale remarks, "that of all the persons who were convicted of capital crimes, while he was on the bench, he found a few only, who would not confess, on inquiry, that they began their career of wickedness, by a neglect of the duties of the Sabbath, and vicious conduct on that day." And in favor of strictly keeping the Sabbath, he gives this decided testimony, from his own experience. "I have found that by a strict and diligent observation, that a due observing the duty of this day, hath ever had joined to it a blessing upon the rest of my time; and the week that hath been so begun, hath been blessed and prosperous to me. And, on the other side, when I have been

negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week hath been unsuccessful and unhappy to my secular employments ; so that I could easily make an estimate of my success in my own secular employments the week following, by the manner of observing this day ; and this, I do not write lightly or inconsiderately, but upon a long and sound observation and experience."

Let me then enjoin it upon you, my friends, with all possible seriousness, and the deepest concern for your present and eternal well-being, to "*remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*"*

5. In all our large towns, there ought to be courses of instruction established for the special benefit of young men. In many parts of Great Britain, this has been done with the happiest effect. Associations have been formed and lectures instituted for the purpose of explaining the sciences, in

* The following fact is worthy of notice. It is from a merchant of very high standing. He stated it to a gentleman of distinction in New Haven, after having heard the above remarks on the Sabbath, and by him it was communicated to the author.

"I have particularly noticed, he observed, that those merchants in New York, who have kept their counting rooms open on the Sabbath, during my residence there, (twenty-five years,) have failed, without an exception."

an easy and familiar manner, in application to the practical arts of life. These lectures are attended by apprentices, and clerks, and young men just commencing business ; and thus, while they have opened to them a source of rational amusement, they are cultivating their minds and acquiring that knowledge, which will not only render them skilful in their business, but prepare them to become intelligent and useful members of society.

It is often said, and with much truth, that young persons must have some amusement,—they must have something to occupy and interest their minds. They cannot feed on vacancy, or be satisfied with nothing. If they have no internal sources of enjoyment, they will go abroad for them. If they have no taste for books, no habits of study and reflection, and no means furnished them, of improving their minds and hearts, what less can be expected, than that they should spend their leisure hours in noisy mirth and vain amusements,—in frequenting the gambling table—the circus—the theatre—and other places of vicious resort ? A very small part of what is annually expended in our large towns for the support of these nurseries of crime and wretchedness, would furnish most

ample means of carrying into effect the plan now suggested.

There is no way to keep the young from scenes of dissipation, but by presenting them a substitute in something that shall interest their hearts and minds, and engage them in a course of intellectual and moral improvement. As matters now are, our young men of business usually finish their education, at fourteen, or fifteen years of age,—at the very time, when their minds are most susceptible of improvement ;—when they are most exposed to temptation, and most need the protecting and guiding influence of judicious instruction. Something to supply this sad deficiency, has recently been attempted in the city of New York, and with the fairest promise of success. Every attempt of this kind deserves encouragement, as it tends to check the progress of vice, and throw a shield around the morals and happiness of the rising generation.

6. All good members of society ought to make it an object, to give special patronage and encouragement to young men of worth and character. This would operate as a reward to virtue and good conduct, and as a punishment to vice and mis-

deeds. And if young men could once be convinced that the patronage and favor of the respectable part of the community, and consequently their success in life, depend on their possessing a fair, unimpeachable character, it would have the happiest influence on their morals and habits.

Here is a field, my young friends, which you, especially, are called to cultivate. You ought to bear a constant and united testimony in favor of good principles and good morals,--to lift up an indignant voice, against all the intemperate and profane, against Sabbath breakers and gamblers, and vicious persons of every description ; and as from time to time, youths of fair and promising character come among us, special pains should be taken to attach them to good society, and to prevent their being drawn away by those who lie in wait to corrupt and destroy. You ought to perform the angelic office of guardians and advisers to those who are younger than yourselves, and who look to you for example. O what a protection might you afford to the youthful and the inexperienced among us ; what a safeguard, throw around the morals of the rising generation and the interests of the community, if you would but unite your influence and

resolve that it shall all be on the side of God and human happiness.

Finally, if you would be secure from the dangers that threaten you in this state of your probation, put your trust in God. There is no sufficient safety, but in the protection and guidance of your great Creator and final Judge. And to this you can have no title without true religion. Without the love and the fear of God reigning in your bosom, you are cast unshielded into the midst of a world that is full of temptation and evil ;—you are abroad upon a dark and boisterous ocean, with nothing to protect or guide ; and though you may fear no danger, and, for a time, seem to be making the voyage of life in safety, lowering clouds and fierce storms will ere long gather around you, and you will be driven upon the rocks,—wrecked and lost on the shores of a miserable eternity.

But putting your trust in God, you shall be safe amidst all dangers, and happy amidst all trials ;—you shall outride every storm, escape every peril, and attain the eternal rest of heaven—" cheered and directed by the star of Bethlehem."

LECTURE III.

IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES.

DANIEL, vi. 10.

NOW WHEN DANIEL KNEW THAT THE WRITING WAS SIGNED, HE WENT INTO HIS HOUSE ; AND, HIS WINDOWS BEING OPEN IN HIS CHAMBER TOWARD JERUSALEM, HE KNEELED UPON HIS KNEES THREE TIMES A DAY, AND PRAYED, AND GAVE THANKS BEFORE HIS GOD, AS HE DID AFORETIME.

This Daniel, while yet a youth, was carried captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. By the singular integrity and excellence of his character, aided by the smiles of a favoring providence, he rose from the condition of a captive, to preside over the affairs of the empire. He lived under the reign of three successive monarchs ; from each of whom, he received the highest honors, which it was in their power to bestow. This excited the jealousy of the other courtiers, who could not endure to see one raised, from the humble condition of a captive, to an elevation so much above themselves. They therefore formed a conspiracy

against his life. Having sought in vain to find occasion against him, concerning the affairs of the kingdom, they resolved to attack him on the ground of his religion. To accomplish their wicked purpose, they assembled before Darius, the king, and proposed to him a decree, that whosoever should ask a petition of any god or man, for thirty days, save of the king, should be cast into the den of lions. Flattered by this incense offered to his vanity, the king signed the decree, and made it, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, irrevocable. This brought Daniel into a condition of extreme peril. He had now to make his election, between the renunciation of his religion, and death, in its most terrible form. And what was his choice? Trusting in the God of his life, he remained firm to his duty, and "braved, in calm devotion, the decree that consigned him to the den of lions." When he knew that the writing was signed, he repaired to his house, and there, in his chamber, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, the city of his fathers' sepulchres, then laid waste, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Here you see the influence of established principles of action. Daniel was not a man to trifle with his conscience. He feared God; and therefore felt, that he had nothing else to fear. This gave him an integrity of character, which no bribes could corrupt. This gave him a firmness of character, which no dangers could intimidate. This gave him a dignity and worth of character, which extorted respect, even from his enemies. This gave him favor with God; brought him forth in safety from the den of lions; secured for him a crown of honor in the sight of men, and a crown of glory in the kingdom of heaven.

From this illustrious example, I wish to present to you, young gentlemen, *the great importance of established principles of action.*

The auspicious bearing of such principles, on the formation of your characters, and on your best interests both for this and the future world, cannot be too highly estimated. Indeed, my friends, you are to be, in this life, and in that which is to come, just what your principles make you. These are the foundation and frame work of character; these, the mainspring of purpose and action; and while they are the immediate and chief

objects of God's inspection in moral beings, they form the primary ground of acquital or condemnation, at his bar of judgment. It is therefore just as important, that you should, in early life, adopt correct and fixed principles of action, as it is, that you should here sustain a good character, and hereafter, enjoy the approbation and favor of Almighty God. I say, *in early life;* because the principles, which you now adopt, will probably remain with you, as long as you live, and exert a decisive influence over your condition, during the whole of your future being

In discussing the subject before us, I shall, first, direct your attention to some of *the false, and therefore injurious* principles of action, which you, in common with others, are liable to adopt.

1. The first, which I shall mention, is the *principle of honor.* This is the principle, by which certain people of fashion,—by which libertines, and duellists, and those who affect to call themselves gentlemen, profess to be governed. As a principle of action, it has no reference to the law of God, nor to the established laws of morality; but only to certain particulars of manners, and rules of intercourse, adopted by such characters,

as have just been named, for their own convenience and pleasure.

The utter defectiveness, not to say criminality and baseness, of this principle, it is needless to remark. It overlooks all the duties which we owe to God and to one another, as moral and accountable beings. It tolerates profaneness and the licentious indulgence of all the natural appetites and passions. It makes a virtue of pride and revenge ; and, in defiance of the laws, both of God and man, assumes to itself the right of avenging its own wrongs, and exults in the blood of its murdered victim.

A principle like this may seem to some of you, too corrupt and villanous, ever to be adopted, but by the lowest and most worthless of mankind. In point of fact, however, it is adopted by vast multitudes, who are distinguished for their intelligence and refinement, and who move in the highest walks of life. It exists, in the full vigor of its influence, in many states of the union ; in the navy, and in the army ; and, I am ashamed to say it, in the halls of Congress,—a foul blot on our national character. Shameful and guilty, as this principle may now seem to you, my young friends, the time

may come, when *you* shall be severely tried on this very point. Should your lot, in future life, be cast in certain sections of our country, where the law of honor is the established rule of action and intercourse, you might be obliged to take your stand;—either to violate this law, at the sacrifice of your reputation; or obey it, at the sacrifice of your soul. In such an extremity, you will feel the need of established principles to sustain you. Let us notice,

2. *The principle of pleasure.* There are many young persons, especially in large and populous places, who appear to live only for their own enjoyment. They are placed in circumstances, it may be, which raise them above the necessity of personal exertion to obtain a livelihood. They are surrounded by opulent friends, and have, either in possession, or in prospect, what they deem an ample fortune. Thus situated, they give themselves up to a life of pleasure. They have no serious occupation or calling, to engage their attention, or employ their time. They live without plan,—without any object or aim, above their own personal gratification. *Diversion*, *pleasure*, *amusement*,—these are the shadows which they pursue,

and which fill up the little round of their existence.

It is needless to say, how entirely persons of this description mistake, not only the great end of their being, but likewise the way to true happiness. A life thus spent is a life lost. It is utterly inconsistent with all manliness of thought and action; and while it forms a character of effeminacy and feebleness, it is sure to bring on its possessor, the contempt of all worthy and good men, and to embitter the decline of life, with shame and self-reproach.

Man was made for action,—for duty and usefulness; and it is only when he lives in accordance with this great design of his being, that he attains his highest dignity and truest happiness. To make pleasure our ultimate aim is certainly to fail of it.

No matter what a young man's situation and prospects are; no matter if he is perfectly independent in his circumstances, and heir to millions; he will certainly become a worthless character, if he does not aim at something higher than his own selfish enjoyment; if he does not indeed devote himself to some honorable and useful calling.

I will add under this head, that so far as the

formation of a good character and success in the world are concerned, I would rather have a child of mine, begin life, with nothing to rely upon, but his own exertions, than be heir to the richest estate in the country. Character and success depend vastly more on personal effort, than on any external advantages. With such effort, the humblest cannot fail to rise ; without such effort, the highest cannot fail to sink.

3. Another false and most pernicious principle of action is *the love of money;*—a principle, that exerts a mightier and more extended influence over the children of men, than perhaps any other, by which they are actuated. It is declared by the Apostle to be the root of all evil ; and he tells us in connexion with this, what accords with universal observation, that *they, that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*

I touched upon this topic in the last lecture, and will not therefore enlarge upon it in this place. I will only add, that when the love of money becomes, in any man, a dominant principle of action, there is an end of all hope of his ever attaining the

true excellence of an intelligent and moral being. In the very act of yielding himself to this principle, he becomes, in the sight of God, an idolater. Jehovah is dethroned from his heart, and Mammon set up there, as the idol of his daily and supreme homage. And having thus alienated himself from the God who made him, he, almost as a matter of course, becomes fraudulent and oppressive towards his fellow men. Money is the ruling object of his affections,—the supreme and governing motive of his conduct ; and where this is the case, it is not to be expected, that a man will be very scrupulous, as to the means of obtaining it. He can hardly fail to become *an oppressor, a liar and a cheat.* In the mean time, while his soul assimilates itself to his treasure, and is transmuted, as it were, into the mere earthly mass which he so loves with all his heart ; God, and heaven, and eternity, are hardly more regarded or thought of, than if they did not exist. To the all-absorbing influence of this debasing and ruinous principle, the young men of this country, and of the present day, are, as was remarked in a former discourse, peculiarly and most eminently exposed. The universal rage is to be rich ; and in the pursuit of this

object, great multitudes are sacrificing their consciences, their souls and their God.

4. Let us consider next the principle of *popularity ;*—the love of *human applause.* This is a principle of powerful influence in the minds of men, and particularly, of young men. To be unknown, to be neglected, is what they cannot endure. They have a strong desire to be on good terms with the world ; to have the esteem and favor of their fellow men. And so far is well. To be insensible to public opinion, or to the estimation in which we are held by others, indicates any thing, rather than a good and generous spirit. It is indeed the mark of a low and worthless character ;—devoid of principle, and therefore devoid of shame. A young man is not far from ruin, when he can say, without blushing, *I don't care what others think of me.*

But to have a proper regard to public opinion is one thing ; to make that opinion our rule of action is quite another. The one we may cherish consistently with the purest virtue and the most unbending rectitude ; the other we cannot adopt, without an utter abandoment of principle and disregard of duty. The young man whose great aim is to

please; who makes the opinion and favor of others his rule and motive of action, stands ready to adopt any sentiments, or pursue any course of conduct, however false and criminal, provided only, that it be popular. In every emergency, his first question is, what will my companions, what will the world think and say of me, if I adopt this, or that course of conduct? Duty, the eternal laws of rectitude, are not thought of. Custom, fashion, popular favor; these are the things, that fill his entire vision, and decide every question of opinion and duty. Such a man can never be trusted; for he has no integrity, and no independence of mind, to obey the dictates of rectitude. He is at the mercy of every casual impulse and change of popular opinion; and you can no more tell whether he will be right or wrong to-morrow, than you can predict the course of the wind, or what shape the clouds will then assume.

When this pliancy of disposition and character appears in a *young* man, it is painfully ominous, as to his future course. He will probably retain the same flexible temper through life, and never have much decision or firmness of character. He will always be peculiarly exposed to dis-

regard the decisions of conscience, and proceed subservient to the will and caprice of others. And what is the usual consequence of this weak and foolish regard to the opinions of men ?—What the *end* of thus acting in compliance with custom, in opposition to one's own convictions of duty ? It is to lose the esteem and respect of the very men whom you thus attempt to please. Your defect of principle and hollow heartedness are easily perceived ; and though the persons to whom you thus sacrifice your conscience, may affect to commend your complaisance, you may be assured, that, inwardly, they despise you for it. Young men can hardly commit a greater mistake, than to think of gaining the esteem of others, by yielding to their wishes contrary to their own sense of duty. Such conduct is always morally wrong, and rarely fails to deprive one, both of self-respect, and of the respect of others.

5. Somewhat allied to the principle just considered, is another, which I know not how to designate by any term, that will give you a definite idea of it. Its name is *prudence*, but its nature is *cunning*. It is a thing of many aspects and of many tongues ; it can appear in any form and speak in

any language. It is sometimes called *management !*—a vile compound of sagacity and deceit; of duplicity and meanness. It puts on the semblance of kindness and concern for your good; but its heart is treachery and selfishness. It meets every man on his blind side; and by stratagem, makes a tool of him, to accomplish its own wily and selfish purposes. If he is weak, it deceives him by its artifices; if he is vain, it puffs up his vanity by flattery; if he is avaricious, it allures him with the prospect of gain; if he is ambitious, it promises him promotion; if he is timid, it threatens him. Its leading maxim is, the end sanctifies the means; and in pursuing its end, it sticks at no means that promise success.

Is it suggested that a principle like this must be of very limited influence; adopted only by a few, and those of the baser sort? I tell you, my friends, it is of very extensive influence. It is adopted and acted upon, by multitudes who claim to be respectable and intelligent men. They may not indeed, in all cases, be aware that this is their ruling principle of action. They mistake its *nature* by giving it a *wrong* name. They call it prudence, discretion, wisdom. But in plain English, it is

cunning, duplicity, deception. Now this principle of double dealing, of artful accommodation and management, is, if I mistake not, eminently characteristic of the age in which we live. It may be traced in all departments of business, and through all grades of society, down from the grand council of the nation, to a petty town, or parish meeting. Instead of acting in open day light, pursuing the direct and straight-forward path of rectitude and duty, you see men, extensively, putting on false appearances; working in the dark, and carrying their plans by stratagem and deceit. Nothing open, nothing direct and honest; one thing is said, and another thing meant. When you look for a man in one place, you find him in another. With flattering lips and a double heart do they speak. Their language and conduct do not proceed from fixed principle and open hearted sincerity; but from a spirit of duplicity and management.

Against this principle every young man, who has any desire of lasting respectability and influence, ought most carefully to be on his guard. Nothing can be more fatal to reputation, and success in life, than to acquire the character of an *intriguer*

a *manager*. It may succeed for a time, but it will soon be found out; and when found out, it is universally despised. The man who acts on this principle, is very apt to think that nobody knows it. But he is wretchedly mistaken. The thin disguise that is thrown over the inner man, is seen through by every one; and while he prides himself, perhaps, on being *very wise*, and keeping his designs out of sight; all persons, of the least discernment, perfectly understand him, and despise him, for thinking he could make fools of them.

How much better, my friends, to be honest, open-hearted, sincere, in our intercourse with men. How much more for our comfort, for our respectability and usefulness, always to pursue *honest ends, by honest means;* ever keeping on our side, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world. True, this straight forward course may sometimes subject us to some slight, temporary inconvenience; but in the end, it always turns out to our advantage. It is a great thing to have a character for *integrity and uprightness;* and such a character, no manager can

ever have. He will be known ; and when known, every one will be suspicious of him ; will be afraid of him ; will put him away as a spy, and watch him, as an unprincipled and dangerous man.

6. Another false principle, which I must just notice, is, that *it is right to do whatever is sanctioned by common usage and public sentiment.* In every department of business, whether mechanical, mercantile, or professional, there are certain rules, according to which the concerns of each are understood to be conducted ; and while these rules are observed, no one thinks himself liable to the charge, or suspicion of dishonesty. And yet the case may be, and often is, that these rules are utterly subversive of right,—opposed alike to the dictates of conscience and the the word of God. Take a plain case ; the man, who adopts the law of honor as his rule, sees no guilt in duelling ; and, without a pang of remorse, can bathe his hands in the blood of his fellow man. The slave-dealer, while he has custom on his side, justifies his guilty traffic, and thinks it no crime to make merchandise of the bodies and souls of men. I might name other cases which might not perhaps seem quite so plain to you. It is customary, and there-

fore thought right, to sell ardent spirits for common use; and many a merchant, who would shudder at the guilt of doing the deed outright, thinks it no sin to destroy a fellow man by dealing out to him a slow poison. It is customary, and therefore thought right, to set different prices on articles of trade, and to rise, or fall, just according to the genius of the buyer.* It is customary, and therefore thought right, to practice "certain commodious falsehoods,"—"certain gainful evasions" and concealments, and misrepresentations, for the sake of getting off, articles of trade, above their true value. And not to add more, it is customary, we are told and therefore thought right, to avail one's self of knowledge not in the possession of another; or to conceal facts materially affecting the value of the commodity, and thus shift off upon another a *sinking* article of trade.†

* If any thing can justify, or extenuate this *bad* practice, it is the custom, extensively adopted by purchasers, never to take an article of trade, without "beating down" the seller below his first named price. Persons of this description are a constant vexation to honest dealers; and are usually the dupes of those who are dishonest.

† My meaning will be made plain by a case, stated by Cicero, of a corn merchant of Alexandria, arriving at Rhodes in a time of great scarcity, with a cargo of grain, and with knowledge that a number of other vessels with similar cargoes had already sailed from Alexandria and which he had passed on

Now, without taking it upon myself to settle the right or the wrong of such cases, I may say, that while they are extensively justified in the trading world, on the ground of *custom*, there is something in them, which to the eye of conscience, looks very like dishonesty, and cheating, and which, I fear, would ill endure the scrutiny of the great day.

The lesson from all this is, that custom is an unsafe rule of action. It is not the rule of right; and the man, who adopts it as such, may be bringing on himself the guilt and condemnation of an habitual transgressor of God's law. No, my friends, independently of custom;—independently of the will and the laws of man, there are such things as truth and falsehood; as right and wrong. These are, in their nature, immutable and eternal; and every principle of action,

his voyage. He then puts the question, whether the Alexandrine merchant was bound in conscience to inform the buyers of that fact, or to keep silence, and sell his wheat for an extravagant price; and he answers it by saying that in his opinion good faith would require of a just and candid man, a frank disclosure of the fact;—a decision, we think, entirely accordant with the principles of the Gospel, but which is deemed quite too severe for practical use, by many who live under the light, and are bound by the precepts of that Gospel.

that disregards, or sets aside the eternal rules of rectitude, is false and sinful, however it may be sanctioned by common usage.

I have taken up so much of your time in the discussion of false principles, that but little remains to recommend that, which I would have you all adopt as an invariable rule of action,—I mean, an *unbending regard to rectitude and duty*.

1. In the first place then, it is a consideration of great weight, that this fixed regard to duty is demanded by the authority of God. He has made known to us what is right, and enforced obedience by all that is tender in his love and fearful in his anger. His inspecting eye is ever upon us; he looks to our principles of action, and approves, or condemns, according as these are stable or fluctuating,—are right or wrong. He beheld, with infinite favor, the firmness of his servant Daniel, in the midst of danger; he protected him in the den of lions, and brought him forth to triumph over his foes. And he regards with equal favor all who regulate their lives by a settled principle of duty; and though for a time he may permit them to suffer for righteousness sake, he will ere long express his kindness towards them, by acknowledging

them as his servants and friends before an assembled world.

2. The principle of unyielding rectitude is recommended by the fact, that it is of *invariable and universal application.* It changes not with times and circumstances ; it is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. It extends to all beings and to all actions ; to the beggar and the prince ; to the man of learning and the ignorant peasant. It is the supreme law of God's moral kingdom ; the bond of union and the source of blessedness, to all the holy subjects of his empire.

To make this, then, your governing principle of action, is to associate yourself with all good beings in the universe. It is to identify your interests and character, with those of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, and to connect your destiny with the issues of that government, which is administered according to the laws of immutable rectitude, and pledges eternal life and blessedness to all who obey its precepts.

3. The principle of rectitude is of *very easy*, as well as of *invariable and universal application.* It is always easy to know what is right ; but often very difficult to know what is for our present inter-

est, or popularity. The man who acts from false principles is often thrown into great straits. He knows not what course to pursue, nor how to avoid the difficulties that are ever thickening around him. His way is dark and crooked ; and full of snares and pits. He lives in a state of constant suspicion and fear. A dreadful sound is in his ears ; he trembles at the rustling of a leaf, and is compelled to have recourse to various dishonest arts and shifts to avoid detection and punishment.

On the contrary, the man, whose ruling principle is duty, is rarely at a loss to know how he ought to act. He has before him a path, plain, direct, open. He is never perplexed with anxious, corroding calculations of interest and popularity. These he leaves to the disposal of providence, solicitous only to approve himself to his conscience and his God, not doubting, but that in the end, he shall find his reward.

4. He who acts from a settled regard to duty is sure to sustain, in the eyes of his fellow men, a character of substantial excellence and worth. He is seen to be a man of established principles,—a man of integrity and uprightness,—a man of high and uniform virtue ; and he *will be respected.*

Whether he be rich or poor, learned or unlearned, he has those solid and excellent traits of character which are certain to secure for him the esteem and confidence of all good men; and even those who are too unprincipled to imitate his virtues, are obliged to yield to him the secret homage of their respect.

And while he thus secures the confidence and respect of all his fellow men, it is a great additional felicity, that he is enabled to respect himself. He is not,—as every unprincipled man must be,—degraded in his own eyes, by acting from unworthy and criminal motives. He feels that the principles by which he is governed are right and safe. They accord with the dictates of his own mind; with the truth of God; and are worthy of his high destination, as a rational and immortal being. He stands on an elevation; he knows the ground beneath him to be firm; his foundation can never be shaken. For while he sustains a character formed on the principle of moral rectitude, he feels assured, that through whatever changes he may pass, or in whatever part of the dominions of God he may be placed, he shall carry with him the mark that he belongs to the Most High, and that he has

on his side the approbation and favor of all wise and benevolent beings in the universe. I add,

5. That acting from a settled and uniform regard to duty, is the surest way to *promote one's temporal interests.*

It is very common, I know, for young men, just commencing business, to imagine that, if they would advance their secular interests, they must not be very scrupulous in binding themselves down to the strict rules of rectitude. They must conform to custom and usage ; and if in buying and selling, they sometimes say the things that are not true, and do the things that are not honest ; why, their neighbours do the same ; and, verily, there is no getting along without it. There is so much competition and rivalry, that to be *strictly honest*, and yet succeed in business, is out of the question.

Now if it were indeed so, I would say to a young man ; then, quit your business. Better dig, and beg too, than to tamper with conscience, sin against God, and lose your soul.

But is it so ;—is it necessary that in order to succeed in business, you should adopt a standard of morals, more lax and pliable, than the one placed before you in the Bible ? Perhaps, for a time, a

rigid adherence to rectitude might bear hard upon you ; but how would it be in the end ? Possibly, your neighbour, by being less scrupulous than yourself, may invent a more expeditious way of acquiring a fortune. If he is willing to violate the dictates of conscience ; to lie, and cheat, and trample on the rules of justice and honesty, he may, indeed, get the start of you, and rise suddenly to wealth and distinction. But would you envy him his riches, or be willing to place yourself in his situation ? Sudden wealth, especially, when obtained by dishonest means, rarely fails of bringing with it sudden ruin. Those who acquire it, are of course, beggared in their morals, and are often, very soon, beggared in property. Their riches are corrupted ; and while they bring the curse of God on their immediate possessors, they usually entail misery and ruin upon their families.

If it be admitted then, that strict integrity is not always the shortest way to success; is it not the surest, the happiest and the best ? A young man of thorough integrity may, it is true, find it difficult, in the midst of dishonest competitors and rivals, to start in his business or profession ; but how long, ere he will surmount every difficulty ; draw

around him patrons and friends, and rise in the confidence and support of all who know him ?

Look around, my friends, over this community, and see who they are, that are most prospered in their temporal interests, happiest in their lives, and most respected in their characters. Are they not the men of firm and decided principles,—of fair and open conduct ? There are, thank God, many such in the midst of us,—many, who know not how to sacrifice their conscience, to their interest,—many who conduct their affairs with strict probity, with a noble, unbending regard to truth and duty. And are not these the characters whom you and all men most respect and esteem ? Are they not in the greatest credit and in the happiest condition, sharing largest in the pleasures of an approving mind, and in the confidence and love of their fellow men ? Be these then your pattern ; tread in their steps, imitate their virtues, and rise to their honor and happiness. What, if in pursuing this course, you should not, at the close of life, have so much money by a few hundred dollars ? Will not a fair character, an approving conscience, and an approving God, be an abundant compensation for this little deficiency of pelf ?

O there is an hour coming, when one whisper of an approving mind, one smile of an approving God, will be accounted of more value than the wealth of a thousand worlds like this. In that hour, my young friends, nothing will sustain you but the consciousness of having been governed in life by worthy and good principles.

And now, that you may adopt, and ever act under the influence of such principles, three things are indispensable.

1. A clear and well defined knowledge of the proper rule of life. The distinctions between right and wrong, in your mind, must not be vague and fluctuating; but clearly ascertained and thoroughly settled. Your views of duty must be derived, not from the maxims of a loose and pliant morality, but from the word of God and the dictates of an enlightened conscience. There must be a quick perception and a lively feeling of obligation,—a moral sense that would "feel a stain, like a wound," and cause you to shrink at the very appearance of evil.

2. A deep and practical conviction of your responsibility to God. If, like Daniel, you would be firm and decided in duty, you must, like him,

realize that you are the creatures of God's power, and the subjects of God's government ; that you live and act every moment under the inspection of his omniscient eye, and that to him, you are to give account of the deeds done in the body. In this there is duration and vigor ; and nothing short of this can arm you against the temptations of the world and make you steadfast in the path of duty and heaven. And while you thus keep your eye upon the will of God, and the retributions of his judgment seat, there must be,

3. A deliberate and settled resolution, *always to do "whatever you judge to be most to God's glory and your own good, profit, and pleasure, on the whole, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence."* This was the resolution of a great and good man now in the world of light ; and it is most worthy of an immortal being. Whatever be your condition, or calling in life, keep in view the whole of your existence. Act not for the little span of time allotted you in this world, but act for eternity. Look beyond the narrow limits of earth to the scenes of that eternal world to which you are going, and ever aim to do what will promote your

best interests, ten thousand ages hence, when all the riches and honors of earth shall have vanished away. Then shall you rise superior to every false, unworthy principle of action, and attain the true dignity and happiness of intelligent beings. Then shall you be safe amidst all temptations, and happy amidst all trials; and on the great day of account, you shall hear, from the throne of judgment, the sentence of approval and peace.—

Servant of God, well done! well hast thou fought,
The better fight—
—for this was all thy care,
To stand approved in sight of God,
Though worlds judged thee perverse.

LECTURE IV.

FORMATION AND IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER.

PROVERBS, xxii. 1.

A GOOD NAME IS RATHER TO BE CHOSEN THAN GREAT RICHES, AND LOVING FAVOR RATHER THAN SILVER AND GOLD.

It is not one of the least excellences of the religion of the Bible, that, whilst it inculcates love to God, as a duty of paramount importance, it exhorts us to think on those things that are lovely and of good report among men. From the most sublime exhibitions of the character of God and the scenes of the future world, it descends, with its system of instruction and example, of precept and motive, into all the relations of ordinary life—pointing out and enforcing the particular duties of each, and urging us to regard and do, whatever tends to purify the heart, elevate the affections, or add dignity and worth to the character. Its grand aim is indeed to make man perfect,—taking from him every thing unlovely, as well as every thing sinful, and adorning him with those graces

and virtues, which, while they secure for him the esteem of the wise and good on earth, qualify him for the everlasting enjoyment and favor of God in heaven. Well might the great Montesquieu, speaking of christianity, exclaim, with rapture,—"How admirable is that religion, which, while it seems only to have in view the felicity of another world, constitutes the happiness of this." Let me recommend that religion to you, my young friends, as the sweetest solace of life; as the noblest ornament and choicest treasure of the soul; as the last, best gift of God to a guilty world. Without this religion, you are poor, whatever else you may possess; and with it, rich, whatever else you may want.

You will pardon this digression, if it seem to you such. I was led into it, by a wish, that the first and greatest of blessings may be your's; and that while you covet a good name among men, you may covet more *that new name, which is better than of sons and daughters; even an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.*

The subject suggested by the text *is the formation and importance of a good character.* In pursuing this subject, I shall

I. Point out the means of forming such a character; and

II. Offer some considerations, illustrative of its inestimable value.

I. If you were about to draw an elegant portrait, you would begin, by forming in your own mind, a distinct image of what you wished to delineate on canvass. So in the case before us. The first step, in the formation of a good character, is to have a just idea of such a character,—a clear view of the essential properties of that good name, which, in the text, is declared to be above all price. A mistake here is fundamental. Whatever false views you adopt, as to the distinctive qualities of a good character, will be very likely to be impressed, as unseemly and distorted lines, on your own character. No man can well be expected to rise higher than his own standard of excellence. If this be low and faulty, such will be the character that is modelled by it. If this be noble and elevated, such will be the character which is formed under its influence.

What then, are the constituent principles of a good character? Or what is meant by that good name, which is so highly commended in our text?

And it differs, we may be sure, *essentially*, from a *great and popular name*. A man may be great, without being good ; and popular, without having much merit of any kind. Many, whom the world are accustomed to call great, have no better title to that distinction, than the fallen spirits,—great in talents and great in crime.

So to be popular is in itself no evidence of real worth of character. The unprincipled demagogue is popular with his own party. The chieftain of a piratical band, or the leader of a clan, composed of the ignorant and the dissipated, are both popular among their associates, and lauded, by their fellows, as the first and the best. In all such cases, popularity indicates nothing so much as an entire absence of principle, and an utter worthlessness of character.

That good name, which is to be chosen rather than great riches, does not depend on the variable, shifting breath of popular opinion. It is based on permanent excellence, and is as immutable, as virtue and truth. It consists in a fair, unsullied reputation,—a reputation, formed under the influence of virtuous principles, and awarded to us, not by the ignorant and the vicious, but by the intel-

ligent and the good, on account of our good qualities and good conduct. In such a name, we look, first of all, for *integrity*, or an unbending regard to rectitude; we look for *independence*, or an habitual determination to be governed by an enlightened conviction of truth and duty; for *benevolence* also, or a spirit of kindness and good will towards men; and though last not least, for *piety towards God*, or an affectionate, reverent regard for the will and glory of the great Jehovah. These are the essential properties of a good character,—the living, breathing lineaments of that good name which in the text is commended to your high regard and careful cultivation.

1 might easily mention other qualities of great importance to a fair reputation; but those just named, are the spring and support of every other excellence. They are indeed so fundamental, that in the absence of them, no one can form or sustain a character which has any stability or worth.

2. It is ever to be kept in mind that a good name, such as has now been sketched, is in all cases the fruit *of personal exertion.* It is not inherited from parents; it is not created by external ad-

vantages ; it is no necessary appendage of birth, or wealth, or talents, or station ; but the result of one's own endeavors,—the fruit and reward of good principles, manifested in a course of virtuous and honorable action. This is the more important to be remarked, because it shows that the attainment of a good name, whatever be your external circumstances, is entirely within your power. No young man, however humble his birth, or obscure his condition, is excluded from the invaluable boon. He has only to fix his eye upon the prize, and press towards it, in a course of virtuous and useful conduct, and it is his. And it is interesting to notice how many of our worthiest and best citizens have risen to honor and usefulness by dint of their own persevering exertions. They are to be found, in great numbers, in each of the learned professions, and in every department of business ; and they stand forth, bright and animating examples, of what can be accomplished by resolution and effort. Indeed, my friends, in the formation of character, personal exertion is the first, the second and the third virtue. Nothing great or excellent can be acquired without it. A good name will not come without being sought.

All the virtues of which it is composed are the result of untiring application and industy. Nothing can be more fatal to the attainment of a good character than a treacherous confidence in external advantages. These, if not seconded by your own endeavors, will "drop you mid way; or perhaps you will not have started, when the diligent traveller will have won the race."

Thousands of young men have been ruined by relying for a good name on their honorable parentage, or inherited wealth, or the patronage of friends. Flattered by these distinctions, they have felt as if they might live without plan and without effort,—merely for their own gratification and indulgence. No mistake is more fatal. It always issues in producing an inefficient and useless character. On this account, it is, that character and wealth rarely continue, in the same family, more than two or three generations. The younger branches, placing a deceptive confidence in an hereditary character, neglect the means of forming one of their own, and often exist in society only a reproach to the worthy ancestry whose name they bear.

3. In the formation of a good character, it is of

great importance that *the early part of life be improved and guarded* with the utmost diligence and carefulness. It was remarked in a former lecture, that the most critical period of life is that which elapses from fourteen to twenty-one years of age. More is done during this period, to mould and settle the character of the future man, than in all the other years of life. If a young man passes this season with pure morals and a fair reputation, a good name is almost sure to crown his maturer years, and descend with him to the close of his days. On the other hand, if a young man, in this spring season of life, neglects his mind and heart; if he indulges himself in vicious courses, and forms habits of inefficiency and slothfulness, he experiences a loss which no efforts can retrieve, and brings a stain upon his character which no tears can wash away.

Life will inevitably take much of its shape and coloring from the plastic powers that are now operating. Every thing almost depends upon giving a proper direction to this outset of life. The course now taken is usually decisive. The principles now adopted, and the habits now formed,

whether good or bad, become a kind of second nature, fixed and permanent.

Youthful thoughtlessness, I know, is wont to regard the indiscretions and vicious indulgences of this period, as of very little importance. But believe me, my friends, they have great influence in forming your future character, and deciding the estimation in which you are to be held in the community. They are the germs of bad habits; and bad habits confirmed, are ruin to the character and the soul. The errors and vices of a young man, even when they do not ripen into habit, impress a blot on the name which is rarely effaced. They are remembered in subsequent life; the public eye is often turning back to them; the stigma is seen; it cleaves fast to the character, and its unhappy effects are felt till the end of his days.

"A fair reputation, it should be remembered, is a plant, delicate in its nature, and by no means rapid in its growth. It will not shoot up in a night, like the gourd that shaded the prophet's head; but like that same gourd it may perish in a night." A character which it has cost many years to establish, is often destroyed in a single hour, or even minute. Guard, then, with peculiar vigi-

lance, this forming, fixing season of your existence; and let the precious days and hours that are now passing by you, be diligently occupied in acquiring those habits of intelligence, of virtue and enterprise, which are so essential to the honor and success of future life.

4. To the formation of a good character it is of the highest importance that you *have a commanding object in view, and that your aim in life be elevated.** To this cause, perhaps, more than to any other, is to be ascribed the great difference which appears in the characters of men. Some start in life with an object in view, and are determined to attain it; whilst others live without plan and reach not for the prize set before them. The energies of the one are called into vigorous action, and they rise to eminence, whilst the others are left to slumber in ignoble ease and sink into obscurity.

It is an old proverb, that he who aims at the sun, to be sure will not reach it, but his arrow will fly higher than if he aimed at an object on a level with himself. Just so in the formation of charac-

* This thought is introduced in page 54, of the second Lecture, but for a somewhat different purpose.

ter. Set your standard high; and, though you may not reach it, you can hardly fail to rise higher than if you aimed at some inferior excellence. Young men are not, in general, conscious of what they are *capable* of doing. They do not task their faculties, nor improve their powers, nor attempt, as they ought, to rise to superior excellence. They have no high, commanding object at which to aim; but often seem to be passing away life without object and without aim. The consequence is, their efforts are few and feeble; they are not waked up to any thing great or distinguished; and therefore fail to acquire a character of decided worth.

My friends, *you may be whatever you resolve to be. Resolution is omnipotent.* Determine that you will be something in the world, and you shall be something. Aim at excellence, and excellence will be attained. This is the great secret of effort and eminence. *I cannot do it, never accomplished any thing; I will try, has wrought wonders.* You have all perhaps heard of the young man, who, having wasted, in a short time, a large patrimony, in profligate revels, formed a purpose, while hanging over the brow of a precipice from which he had determined to throw himself, that he would

regain what he had lost. The purpose thus formed he kept; and though he began by shovelling a load of coals into a cellar, he proceeded from one step to another, till he more that recovered his lost possession, and died an inveterate miser, worth sixty thousand pounds. I mention this, not as an example to be imitated, but as a signal instance of what can be accomplished by fixed purpose and persevering exertion. A young man who sets out in life with a *determination* to excel, can hardly fail of his purpose. There is, in his case, a steadiness of aim,—a concentration of feeling and effort which bear him onward to his object with irresistible energy, and render success, in whatever he undertakes, certain.

5. Another thing of great importance in the formation of a good character, is *intercourse with persons of decided virtue and excellence.* The power of example is proverbial. We are creatures of imitation, and by a necessary influence, our temper and habits are very much formed on the model of those with whom we familiarly associate. In this view, nothing is of more importance to young men than the choice of their companions. If they select for their associates the intelligent, the virtu-

ous, and the enterprising, great and most happy will be the effects on their own character and habits. With these living, breathing patterns of excellence before them, they can hardly fail to feel a disgust at every thing that is low, unworthy and vicious, and be inspired with a desire to advance in whatever is praiseworthy and good. It is needless to add, the opposite of all this is the certain consequence of intimacy with persons of bad habits and profligate lives.

Young men are, in general, but little aware how much their reputation is affected in the view of the public, by the company they keep. The character of their associates is soon regarded as their own. If they seek the society of the worthy and the respectable, it elevates them in the public estimation, as it is an evidence that they respect themselves, and are desirous to secure the respect of others. On the contrary, intimacy with persons of bad character, always sinks a young man in the eye of the public. While he, perhaps, in intercourse with such persons, thinks but little of the consequences, others are making their remarks ; they learn what his taste is ; what sort of company he prefers, and predict, on no doubtful

ground, what will be the issue to his own principles and character. There are young men in this city, and those, too, who have no mean opinion of themselves, to be intimate with whom, would be as much as one's reputation is worth.

And let me add under this head, that a young man, especially in this place, may choose his company. If he wishes for good society, he can find it. If he respects himself, he will be respected. If he is virtuous and intelligent; if he is modest and unassuming—benevolent and enterprising, he will meet with very little difficulty in connecting himself with those of similar character. In this respect, the young men of this city enjoy peculiar advantages for acquiring a good character. There is here an ascendant influence in favor of virtue and good order. You have here no powerful, overbearing, public sentiment against morality and religion, with which to contend. The path of virtuous and honorable conduct is unobstructed and open to all; and many there are, who are to be seen walking in it; so that if there are young men who are excluded from good society, the fault is their own. But,

6. Of all the means of forming a good charac-

ter, the most efficient is a *deep and practical sense of responsibility to God.* He who has an abiding impression on his mind of the ever present and immutable God, and who contemplates, with due affection and reverence, his relations to him and eternity, has acting on his character an influence of constant and mighty energy,—preserving him from all that is low and debasing; and elevating him to all that is holy and blissful. If to contemplate patterns of human excellence tends to improve the heart and elevate the character, how much more certainly and constantly will a similar effect be produced by an habitual contemplation of the adorable Jehovah,—"a character which, to use the language of another, "borrows splendor from all, that is fair; subordinates to itself all, that is great; and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe." Beholding *this* character, and living under *this* influence, we are changed from glory to glory, into the same image, as by the spirit of the Lord.

Indeed, my friends, true religion, the love and the fear of God implanted in the mind, is the most powerfully transforming cause, that can be brought to act on the character of man. The truths it un-

folds, the motives it urges, the interests it involves, the prospects it opens, the hopes it inspires, and the fears it awakens, are fitted to influence, in the most powerful manner, all the feelings and faculties of the mind,—to fill the soul with the noblest views and the purest sentiments; to direct all its energies, desires and purposes, to their proper use and end. When once seated in the bosom, it raises the thoughts and hopes to God and heaven; it opens the eye on the grandeur and bliss of eternity; it imparts new light and vigor to the mind; throws around the character and ways, the protection of established principles and habits; and secures to its possessor a safe passage through all the temptations of this corrupted and corrupting world, to the abodes of eternal purity and blessedness. The man of true religion stands on firm and elevated ground; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; and he feels within him the workings of a principle, which, like the hand of God, will not let him go; but amidst all the assaults of the world, keeps him in the path of virtue, of happiness and heaven.

The character that is without religion, is without the firmest support, and the chief excellence of a moral being. It has impressed on it the deformity

of a great and palpable defect; and whatever virtues it does possess, are like flowers planted in the snow, or withered by the drought—wanting the life, the vigor, and the beauty, which religion alone can impart.

Such, then, are the means of forming a good character. Let us pass,

II. To a brief illustration of its importance.

1. It is then, in the first place, a consideration of no small weight, that a good character is a sure protection against suspicion, and evil reports. A man of bad, or doubtful character, is suspected of a thousand crimes of which he may not be guilty. And if he does a good deed, it is apt to be ascribed to a bad motive. He has lost the confidence of his fellow men. They know him to be unprincipled and hollow-hearted; and are therefore ready to believe all the evil that is thought or said of him, but none of the good.

On the other hand, a man of fair character—of tried and established reputation—stands out to the eye of the public, as one who is above suspicion, and above reproach. The malicious and the wicked may, indeed, vent their evil surmisings, and attempt to tarnish his fair name; but their attempts

recoil upon their own heads. Their arrows spend their force in the air; or striking upon the broad shield, behind which the object of their malice is protected, fall harmless to the ground. He is conscious of acting from correct principles; and being known to the public as a man of integrity and worth, he need never give himself much concern, as to any unfavorable reports that may be circulated respecting him. He is safe in the confidence of all who know him. They acquit him without trial; and believe his innocence without the judgment of a court. Slander may indeed for a moment fix its fangs on a spotless character; but such a character has within itself an antidote to the poison, and rises from the temporary wound with invigorated strength and brightened beauty.

I will just add in this connexion, that, in the conscious possession of a good character, there is a *preserving, exciting influence*, which is of the greatest value. A young man who has passed through his preparatory course with correct morals, and is entering upon life with a fair reputation, feels that he possesses a treasure, that is above all price; and he will be likely to guard it with the utmost circumspection and carefulness.

And while he will thus be preserved from the contamination of evil ; he will also be excited to make higher and still higher attainments in excellence. Character is like stock in trade ; the more of it a man possesses, the greater are his facilities for making additions to it. Or, it is like an accumulating fund,—constantly increasing in value, and daily acquiring to itself fresh accessions of stability and worth.

2. The very great satisfaction of *self-respect*, connected with a good character, adds much to its value. There is nothing earthly more delightful than the full, sweet music of an approving conscience. There is a sublimity in conscious rectitude ; a pleasure in the approbation of one's own mind, in comparison with which, the treasures of earth are not worth naming.

The peace and happiness arising from this source are above all change, and beyond all decay. Disappointments and trials do but improve them. They go with us into all places ; and attend us through every changing scene of life. They sustain and delight alike, at home and abroad ; by day and by night ; in solitude and society ; in sickness and in health ; in life and in death ; in time and eternity. The pleasures of an

approving mind never fail. They are like the tree of life, whose leaf never withers, and whose fruit shall refresh us during eternal ages.

In addition to this, there is the high satisfaction arising from the esteem and respect of all good men. This is the loving favor, which, in the text, is commended as better than silver and gold. And who does not feel that the commendation is just? What more fills the heart with joy—what affords higher, or more permanent happiness, than the good will, the friendly regards, the unsuspecting confidence and cordial approbation of the worthy and the excellent among our fellow men? And all this is sure to be awarded to him who sustains a fair and irreproachable character.

Indeed, my friends, if you possess such a character, all men, whether good or bad, will be constrained to yield you the homage of their respect. This is the tribute which vice is always compelled to pay to virtue. You will have a testimony in your favor, engraven upon every heart,—compelling reluctant approbation, even from those, who have not principle to imitate your virtues, or copy your example. And while a good name will secure for you the esteem and the confidence of your fellow men, how will it increase your capacity,

and extend your sphere of usefulness? Who are the men whose advice is most highly valued; whose opinions have greatest weight; whose patronage is most eagerly sought; and whose influence is most extensively felt in the community? Are they not the men of principle; the men of known worth and established reputation? *Character is power; character is influence;* and he who has character, though he may have nothing else, has the means of being eminently useful, not only to his immediate friends, but to society, to the church of God, and to the world.

On the other hand, when a man's character is gone, all is gone. All peace of mind, all complacency in himself, are fled forever. He despises himself; he is despised by his fellow men. Within is shame and remorse; without, neglect and reproach. He is of necessity a miserable and useless man; and he is so, even though he be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day. It is better to be poor; it is better to be reduced to beggary; it is better to be cast into prison, or condemned to perpetual slavery; than to be destitute of a good name, or endure the pains and the evils of a conscious worthlessness of character.

3. Consider, next, the importance of a good character to your *success in the world.* If a young man completes the time of his apprenticeship, or clerkship, with good principles and a fair character, he is made for life. His reputation is better to him than the richest capital. *It makes friends; it creates funds; it draws around him patronage and support; and opens for him a sure and easy way to wealth, to honor and happiness.* There are in this, and there are in every community, men of property and influence, who always stand ready to encourage and assist young men of enterprise and merit. The way is always open for such to establish themselves in business, and to rise in their calling, whatever it be.

You perceive, then, my friends, that so far as success in life is concerned, all depends on a few years—and those, the years that are now passing over you. If you wisely improve this seed time of life; this most precious period of your existence; if you now adopt correct principles, and form correct habits, and come forward upon the stage, with a fair, unsullied reputation, your fortunes are made. The field of successful enterprise will be open to you; friends and patrons will rise up to encourage your efforts and advance your inter-

ests ; and the whole community will award to you its confidence and support.

On the contrary, if you misimprove the opportunity which you now enjoy of establishing a character ; if you neglect your minds and hearts ; acquire bad habits and a bad reputation ; you raise a barrier in the way of your success in life, which you will probably never be able to surmount. I repeat the remark, young gentlemen, and I beg that it may make a due impression on your minds, *that so far as success in the world is concerned, all depends upon a few short years—upon the character you form in this spring season of your being.*

4. The happiness of all with whom you are, or shall be connected in life, is deeply involved in the characters you are now forming. Those kind parents who watched over your infancy and childhood, and who are looking to you as the props of their declining age ; those brothers and sisters, who are allied to you by ties of the tenderest affection ; all your dear relatives and friends, regard, with deep and anxious solicitude, the course upon which you are entering, and the habits, which are to stamp the character and fix the destiny of your

future life. In no way can you contribute so much to the happiness of all who esteem and love you, as by sustaining a good character ; and in no way, pierce their hearts with keener sorrow, than by compelling them to behold you sacrificing a fair reputation and all your prospects for life, in unworthy and vicious indulgences.

But more than this; you are soon to become fathers of families ; to be entrusted with the care and training of immortal beings, who, like yourselves, are to act their parts on the stage of life, and then pass to a state of just and eternal retribution. You are, likewise, soon to be the leading, acting members of society ; to occupy all the places of influence and trust, and to have at your disposal all the great and precious interests of the church and state. Consider now, how much depends on the character you are forming ;—your own happiness ; the happiness of your friends and families ; and the welfare of this whole community —all depend on your possessing a character of true virtue and excellence.

Nor is this all. The effects of your influence are not confined to the present scene of action ;— they extend to future ages, and will be felt forever. The character which you possess will be impres-

sed on the next generation; and that on the next; and that on the next; and thus the character, and, consequently, the happiness or misery of countless multitudes, both in this and the future world, depend on the conduct which you pursue, and the principles which you propagate.

Such then are the motives which urge you to the attainment of a good character. It is a protection against suspicions, and evil reports; it is a source of the purest and most lasting enjoyment; it secures for us the esteem and confidence of our fellow men; it increases the power and enlarges the sphere of our usefulness; it has the most direct and happy bearing on our success in life; it stands connected with the happiness of our families and friends; with the welfare of society; with the temporal and eternal happiness of unborn generations.

That you may feel more deeply the weight of these considerations, just reverse the picture, and think of the direful evils of a ruined character.—It will expose you to a thousand painful suspicions and blasting reports; it will deprive you of all self-respect and peace of mind; it will exclude you from the confidence and esteem of your fellow men, and bring upon you their neglect and contempt; it will cut you off from all means of

usefulness, and render you, either a mere cypher, or a nuisance in society; it will prove an insurmountable barrier to your success in life; it will be bitterness and sorrow to your friends, and all with whom you may be connected in the world; it will be the means of perpetuating bad principles and a bad character, in your own families, and to future generations, and thus be the occasion of eternal ruin to many immortal souls.

Do you now ask for other motives? I have one more to offer.—*On the character you are now forming hangs your own eternal destiny.* Those dispositions and habits, which you now acquire, you will be likely to retain through life, and carry with you into another world. "They are the dying dress of the soul,—the vestments in which it must come forth to meet the sentence of an impartial judge." If filthy, they will be filthy still,—if holy, they will be holy still. Yes, my friends, the character you are now forming is that, probably, in which you will appear before the judgment seat of God; and by which your condition for eternity is to be decided. O then, be careful that you acquire a character of meetness for the society of just men made perfect in heaven; and not for the society of lost spirits in the world of wo.

LECTURE V.

RELIGION THE CHIEF CONCERN.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 13.

LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER; FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS; FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

I approach the subject of this evening's Lecture with a feeling of despondency. Hitherto we have gone along together; and while you have appeared to take a lively interest, in the various subjects of discussion that have come before us, it is an additional cause of felicitation, that you have given so ready and so general an assent to the sentiments that have been advanced. But we have now come to a point where I am afraid we shall part. The text will lead me to speak of religion; of the soul; of God and eternity; of heaven and hell; and the cause of that despondency, which oppresses my mind, is an apprehension that in speaking of these great subjects, I shall not find, in my hearers, the same preparation of heart duly

to estimate and feel their weighty and solemn import. Am I mistaken in this apprehension? Would that it may prove so. To the topics discussed in the preceding lectures, though relating chiefly to the objects and pursuits of time, you gave an interested and candid attention. But would it not be too sanguine, to expect a similar attention, now that we are about to direct your thoughts to the high concerns of eternity? It may seem an unpleasant intimation, but I cannot forbear to ask, whether some of my hearers are not conscious of a diminished interest in the subject proposed as the theme of the present discourse,—whether, as they approach a more spiritual region, and are about to take a view of their relations to God and another world, they are not conscious of a dark mist hanging over, and intercepting their vision,—of a chilling coldness, falling upon their affections and checking the full, warm flow of sympathy and interest, which they felt in the discussion of topics of a more earthly and secular character? Strange effect of eternity, one would think, to throw into obscurity and littleness, the subjects with which it is connected. And why should it be so? Why should religion, the con-

cerns of the soul, seem to any of you, less worthy of deep and thoughtful attention, than topics which relate only to the transient scenes of this short and precarious life? It cannot be, because religion is a subject of less importance. In comparison with it, all other subjects sink into insignificance. It cannot be, because it is a subject less easily understood. In its essential doctrines and duties, religion is a very plain subject. It cannot be because it is in itself an *unpleasant* subject, fitted only to bring gloomy and melancholy into the bosom of man. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. Your present and eternal well being,—all your dearest interests, both for this and the coming world, depend on the favor and friendship of your great Creator and final Judge; and these can be secured only by the possession of true religion. All this we must believe, if it be admitted, that the soul of man is immortal, or that there is above us, a Being of infinite perfections, and beyond us, a state of just and eternal retribution. Why then ought not religion to be regarded as the first and greatest concern of man? Why should it seem to any rational being a subject worthy only to be treated with indifference, or

repelled with aversion? Why should it be a subject, the bare announcement of which so often throws a chill over the spirits, and freezes up all the avenues of the heart? Who, or how many of my hearers, may be conscious of this state of feeling in themselves, I know not; but in the conviction that it is a state of feeling very common, especially, among young men, I deem it of importance to analyse it; to show whence it originates; and to draw it out, in some of its principal features; that you may see how *utterly unreasonable and foolish it is*, as well as wicked and ruinous, to treat religion with indifference and neglect.

1. In the first place then, we are often pained to notice, in some, an *entire thoughtlessness* on the subject of religion. There are some young men, as there are men of riper age, who really care too little respecting this subject, ever to make it a matter of direct and serious consideration. As if they had nothing to do with the immortal spirits within them, nor with the great Being that made them, nor with the scenes of that invisible state to which they are hastening; they give their affections, their thoughts, their all, to the things of sense and time; and if ever religion obtrudes itself

on their attention, it is immediately repelled as an unwelcome visitant, or retained only as a subject of ridicule and jesting.

But I ask, is this proper, is it rational? Is it worthy of one, who claims to be distinguished from the brutes that perish, in that he has been endued, by the Creator, with the power of thought and is destined to exist beyond the grave? Were one of this character present, and could I gain access to him, I would expostulate with him in terms like these :—Why is it, my friend, that religion is with you a subject of so little interest? It claims to have its origin in a revelation from God; it discloses truths and objects of the most serious and weighty character; it tells you what you are, what is the design of your present existence, and what awaits you in that unseen state, to which you cannot but feel that you are advancing. Is this then a subject to be thrown aside as unworthy of thought and reflection? Are you indeed capable of thinking, and can you see nothing in religion which demands thought? How is it, that you can live surrounded with so many demonstrations of the being and presence of God; with so many solemn mementos of the uncertainty of life,

of the certainty of death, and of an eternity at hand; and yet never raise your thoughts to the God of your life, nor send them forward to the momentous scenes of the future world? You certainly do not mean to reject these things, as the dreams of a vain superstition. You would not, I presume, have me regard you as an atheist, nor class you among those deluded ones, who consider death an eternal sleep, and the grave the seal of oblivion on the character and prospects of man. No, you say, I believe there is a God who made and upholds all things, and that I have within me a 'spirit of noble quality,' which is to survive the dissolution of the body, and exist forever. Do you indeed believe this? Are you *sincere* in what you now say? What, believe there is a God of infinite power and holiness, and yet not fear, nor serve, nor scarcely think of him: that you are to exist forever too, and yet feel no concern whether that existence is to be happy or miserable? Is it the proper use of the noble faculties you possess, to seal them up in forgetfulness of Him who gave them; and the proper end of your being, to bury all your cares and hopes in the things of earth?

Could you only be persuaded to give a moment's

serious attention to this subject, you would be constrained to confess that your believing and acting in this manner is the grossest inconsistency of which a rational being is capable. It is indeed, my friend, utterly beneath your high destination as an intelligent creature of God; and nothing but inconsideration prevents your viewing the subject in the same light. And now, if you still claim the honor of possessing a rational and immortal nature, let me entreat you to prove yourself entitled to this distinction, by showing that you are capable of thinking of what, in all truth, it most deeply concerns you to think,—*of religion, of the soul, of God and eternity.* He, who neglects to think on these subjects, shows either that he has no capacity for thought, or that his faculties are under the influence of a moral madness, and utterly perverted as regards the great end for which they were given. But,

2. If there are some young men who put away religion in mere thoughtlessness, there are others who do it with *fixed aversion.* The very name of religion seems to be an offence to them. They regard it as a gloomy and forbidding subject, and cannot endure to have its claims urged on their at-

tention ; and not satisfied with treating the whole matter with neglect, they often vent their hard feelings, in cavilling against its doctrines and duties ; in reproaching its professors, and turning into ridicule the solicitude which their pious friends manifest for their salvation. Now this is a state of mind, which, I am sure, we must all pronounce, most unreasonable and wicked. And could I persuade myself to believe, that any one present possesses such a state of feeling, I would beg of him, so far to lay aside his prejudices, as to consider, for a moment, what there is in religion to justify this aversion to it. Is it a just cause of offence, that God has made you an intelligent, moral being, and qualified you to love, serve, and obey him ? Is it an offence, that he has made known to you his great and adorable character ; and required you to yield to him the homage of grateful and pious affections ? Is it an offence, that he has given you an immortal existence, that he has opened for you a way of salvation through the death of his Son ; that he is making to you the offer of pardon and life ; and following you, daily, with invitations and calls that you turn unto him and live ? These are the principal things included in religion ; and

can you, in the exercise of sober reason, discover in them, any just cause of aversion and dislike? Had it been better, if you had been left in ignorance of the Being who made you; and of the duties he requires of you; and of the immortal blessedness to which he calls you to aspire? Had it been better, if you had been made like the poor brutes, to breathe, and walk, and suffer a few days on earth, and then sink into eternal night and nothing?

After all, my friend, it is a serious question, which I wish you to put to your conscience,—of what avail is aversion to religion,—what can you expect to gain from it? It cannot alter your relations to God,—these are immutable as his throne. It cannot free you from your obligations to devote yourself to the service of God,—these are eternal as your being. It cannot extinguish the immortal spark which your Creator has lighted up within you,—this is to survive all the changes of time and forever to brighten amid the splendors of heaven, or quench its glory in the flames of hell. What can it avail then, to neglect religion, or to put it away with dislike? Nothing, but to set you in the attitude of hostility to the power of God and

the order of the universe,—nothing, but to cut you off from the favor of the most High and consign you over to the woes of a ruined eternity.

Religion, my young friends, is not a subject to be trifled with ; it is not a subject to be rejected with aversion or dislike. It comes to you as a message from heaven ; it comes clothed with the authority of heaven's King ; it comes to make you holy and happy ; to raise you into a resemblance to your Creator, and meetness for his presence ; and it is your highest interest, as it is your most important duty, to welcome this religion to your bosom, as the sweetest solace of life, and the richest inheritance of the soul. I observe again,

3. That an irreligious state of mind in young men is often indicated, and also greatly strengthened, by the adoption *of loose and erroneous sentiments.* Instead of coming to the Bible to learn thence what they are to believe and do to obtain salvation, they either rest satisfied with no sentiments on the subject of religion, or else take up with mere notions,—with vague, unexamined opinions, which have neither truth nor consistency.

Now if such opinions had no influence in forming the character and deciding the destiny of the

soul, they might be indulged without remark. But their influence is great. They are the principal cause of that insensibility to eternal things which is so common among men, and so ruinous to their immortal interests. They have a direct and powerful tendency to shield the conscience against conviction ; to exclude from the mind the awakening and renewing influence of divine truth, and lull you to security in your sins,—regardless of duty and fearless of danger. They operate as a slow poison, destroying the moral sensibility of the soul, and diffusing, through all its powers, the coldness and torpor of spiritual death. And perhaps my friends, an examination would show that this is one cause, at least, why religion is excluded from *your* hearts. You have wrong views of God, of his law and gospel ; of your character and state as sinners ; and of the terms of salvation proposed in the Bible. And this is the cause why you do not feel the pressure of obligation and the constraining motives to obedience, presented to you in the Gospel. Were your bosoms free from false and delusive sentiments, so that the doctrines of God's word could enter, and press, without obstruction, directly on the heart

and conscience, you could not long hold out against their influence. You would yield your hearts to God and choose him as your portion. Beware then of taking up with vague notions, instead of God's declarations, on the subject of religion. Remember that on this subject, he has spoken in the most clear and authoritative manner. It is not allowed you to indulge in vain speculations, or to oppose the dreams of your imagination to the decisions of the Most High. These decisions are before you ; and it is yours to receive them, in a spirit of humble docility and obedience. If you refuse this, you throw back the message which God has sent you ; and must account for the deed at the bar of judgment.

And recollect my friends, that on the great day of final decision, it will not be what you may have thought and believed, that will stand ; but what God has purposed and declared. If he has declared that you are sinners, and, while impenitent, under the curse of his law, your not believing it will not alter the fact. If he has declared, that except you repent, you shall all perish, your not believing it will not alter the fact. So if he has declared that you shall hereafter stand before his

judgment seat to give an account of the deeds done in the body, and that then, according to your respective characters, you shall be received into heaven, or cast down to hell, your not believing it will not alter the fact. What God says, is forever. His truth shall stand when all the speculations of vain man shall have vanished as a dream.

In this view, it is of supreme importance, that, renouncing all prepossessions and notions of your own devising, you take the Bible as your guide, and derive all your views of religious truth and duty from that pure and infallible source of instruction. It is the book of God; its declarations are eternal truth; make it the man of your counsel; the companion and friend of your pilgrimage; then shall you come safe to your home in the skies, and behold the face of God in glory. It must be added,

4. That young men are often encouraged in their neglect of religion, by the fact of its being neglected by multitudes around them; and also, by the circumstance, that its purity and excellence are so poorly exemplified in the lives of many of its professors. They see great numbers of respectable people, who show no serious regard to religion; and

many who profess it, not at all distinguished in their temper and conduct, from those who make no pretensions to it ; and in too many instances, the inference is drawn, that religion is a vain thing. This is all a mistake. Religion in its truth and importance, is not affected in the least either by the neglect of the worldly, or the sins of the hypocritical, or the imperfections of the pious. It stands as clear from all connection with these, as the "Spirit that pervades all things is pure from matter and from sin." It is not the less worthy of your reception, nor the less imperious in its claims, because many around you neglect it, and others, who profess it, appear to be destitute of its spirit and power. The simple question is,—is religion a reality ; is it founded in truth ; does God require me to love and serve him ; does he command me to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and has he suspended the salvation of my soul on obedience to this command ? If this be admitted, it is nothing to me, if all the world neglect religion. This is a personal concern. It has nothing to do, either with the impenitence of those who are out of the church, or the hypocrisy of those who are in it. *They* are to give account unto God, each

one, for himself. And so are we. On the great day of the Lord, it will not save *you*, nor *me*, that others neglected religion. The convulsions, and disclosures, and decisions, of that awful day will turn off all attention from the character and fate of others, and fix the thoughts of each sinner, on his own character and unchanging destiny. Of the innumerable millions who shall surround the throne of judgment, none will find safety in the imperfections and sins of others. Each will stand or fall by himself, and each receive in his own person the joyous or dread reward of eternal life, or eternal death.

If you have given due weight to the considerations that have now been offered, you are prepared, I trust, to listen, with candor and seriousness, to a few direct arguments by which I would urge the duty enjoined in the text.

To fear God and keep his commandments, it is said, is the whole duty of man. This is a brief description of true religion. It consists in a spirit of *reverent, affectionate, practical obedience to the commands of God ;* and it is urged upon you,

I. In the first place, as an *imperious duty.* When you open the sacred volume, there is one

command, which virtually runs through all its pages, and meets you in every passage ;—it is, that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength ;—it is, that, being sinners, you repent and seek his mercy ; that, being *lost* sinners, you accept of Christ as your Saviour ; that, being destined to an immortal existence, you keep in view the great end of your creation, and always live with a wise reference to the scenes of the invisible world. I need not repeat particular precepts in which this duty is inculcated. Suffice it to say, it is the great design of God, by his word, his providence, and spirit, to enforce this duty. And what thus comes to you as a duty enforced by the infinite authority of God, is distinctly recognized, as such, by every man's conscience ; and these two unite in putting to instant silence every excuse that can be offered for neglecting religion. *What God commands and conscience approves, must be right and practicable.* It is in vain in the face of both these witnesses to plead that you are unable to yield the heart to God, or serve him in a life of piety. That plea is proved false by the testimony of two infallible witnesses ;—the one within you, and the other above you ; and if it be still resorted to, as an ex-

cuse, for neglecting duty, it will ere long turn to the ruin of the soul, and to your final condemnation. There is not the shadow of an excuse for any intelligent being in the universe to offer, for not loving and serving the great and glorious God ; and every thing, that is ever urged in the form of an excuse, goes only to convict of guilt and bind over to perdition. So it shall be found in that dread day when every mouth shall be stopped and the whole world become guilty before God. The duty in question then, presses upon the conscience with all the weight and solemnity of God's authority. It cannot be neglected, it cannot be delayed without directly resisting that authority and arraying the heart against its plain and imperative demands.

2. Religion is urged upon you as *a reasonable service*. It appeals directly to the understanding and conscience, and demands that you decide upon its claims, in the sober, unbiassed exercise of these noblest faculties of your nature. It shrinks not from investigation ; it invites it, and complains only when you put away its demands in careless inattention and thoughtlessness. And what is there, in the whole compass of human thought that comes with more powerful claims for the exercise

of reason, than the inquiry, what is the character of the Being who made and upholds me in existence; what is the government, under which he has placed me; and what the law, which he requires me to obey?—What is the *design* of my present state of existence; what my nature and destination, and what have I to do to prepare myself for that eternal world to which I am so rapidly advancing. These are the most weighty and solemn questions that can be presented to the mind of man; and there cannot be conceived a greater absurdity, or a more criminal perversion of reason, than to treat such inquiries with lightness, or to pass them by without serious consideration. This is a thing so utterly irrational, that, but for its commonness, it would be deemed incredible. It is as if a man, in the possession of rational faculties, should neglect the means of his own subsistence. It is as if he should set fire to his own dwelling, or walk with his eyes open down a precipice. Admit the simple fact, that there is a God and a future state of existence, and that man is beside himself, who does not seriously employ his rational powers in inquiring how he may secure the friend-

ship of the Almighty, and be happy in the eternity before him.

If then, my friends, you would escape the charge of moral insanity, if you would employ the noblest faculty of your nature, about the noblest subject of inquiry, let reason take her scales and deliberately weigh the relative claims of religion and the world; let her put into one scale all the pleasures and advantages which you can expect from the world, and into the other, the present consolations and future rewards of religion, and holding the balance with an even hand, decide which is of the greatest importance, and which shall be your portion.

3. Religion is essential to *your dignity and happiness* as intelligent and immortal beings. "It is not a thing, as some of you may imagine, which your Creator imposes upon you, by a mere arbitrary appointment, as if he would exact something from you, which is in itself useless, or foreign to the necessities of your nature." The true end and glory of your being cannot be attained without it. God has given you the capacity of knowing, of serving, and enjoying him, your great Creator and Benefactor. He has impressed on your mind the seal of immortality, and taught you to

look forward to the high destinies of eternity as the great end of your existence. Such being the constitution of your nature and such your destination, how can you attain the highest dignity and happiness, of which you are capable, but in the possession of religion ;—but in being conformed to the will and enjoying the friendship of the great God in whom you live, and move, and have your existence ? An immortal spirit cannot feed upon dust, or be happy in estrangement from the Author of its being. It sighs for a happiness not to be found in the things of earth ; and pants for a good which God alone can bestow. And tell me, my friends, do you not sometimes feel the need of a better portion than this world can afford you ? Would it not save you from many a sad hour, and from many a painful foreboding, to be able to think of yourselves, without remorse and self-condemnation ; to think of the course you are pursuing, without being terrified with its fearful end ;—to think of the God above you, without being met with his angry frown ;—to think of death, of judgment and eternity, without being overwhelmed with the thought that *there* are to terminate all your joys, and vanish all your hopes ? Would it not

be happy for you to regard God as your Father and friend ;—to feel that you are under the protection and guidance of a power that is above all control,—that is forming you into a likeness to your Saviour, and into a meetness for the society and employments of heaven ;—to feel that death is disarmed of his terrors ; that your eternity is safe, and that come what will, either in this, or the future world, all your dearest interests are secure in the favor and love of Him, whose favor and love never fail ? Now all this is secured to you by religion. Is it not then the surest guide to happiness ; the choicest treasure and noblest ornament of the soul ? When does the frail, dependent creature, man, enjoy such blessedness, or appear with such dignity, as when engaged in the service of the Lord his God ; adoring his infinite perfections, trusting in his mercy, and receiving the communications of his eternal friendship and love ? Then it is, that he stands forth in the true glory of his character, bearing the image of his God, and preparing to dwell in his presence ; his faculties are directed to their proper use and end ; he shows his superiority to the brutes that perish ; and escaping, in some measure from the

degradation and meanness of his earthly condition, he rises toward the purity and perfection of the heavenly world, and is, at length, fitted to become the companion of saints and angels in the world of spirits. Come then, my young friends, and make this *eternal, infinite good* your own. O cast not from you the treasures of heaven ; make not yourselves miserable exiles from God and glory, by the neglect of that, which can alone raise you to the enjoyment of his presence and favor.

4. Religion is urged upon you as a matter that demands your *immediate attention.* If religion is any thing, it is every thing. If it demands your attention at all, it demands your supreme attention, and demands it now. What can you gain by delay ? No clearer revelation is to be given to teach you your duty, or shed new light upon the character of God and the scenes of the future world. No motives more powerful are to be urged, than those now disclosed to your view, and pressed on your minds by the word and providence of God. No season more convenient than the present will ever come, for attending to the things of your eternal peace. The only effect of delay is to multiply obstacles to your conversion,

to render your salvation more hopeless, and cast a deeper gloom over the prospects of your eternity. Now is with *you*, most eminently, the accepted time; and now the day of salvation. The present is an age when the young have peculiar encouragements to seek the Lord their God. A brighter day is dawning upon the world. God appears to be coming forth to raise up, from among the young, a generation for himself. In the multiplied means that are used for their instruction and the great success which attends those means, I behold most cheering indications of the near approach of that day, when all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest. It is one of the most animating signs of the times in which we live, that, in all our cities and towns, there are to be seen great numbers of young people, devoting themselves to the service of God. And as I see them going forth to the work, and to the rewards, to which their Saviour is calling them, I seem to hear them say to all who are lingering behind,—We are journeying to a place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you; come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. Cast in your lot, my

young friends, with the multitudes of your age who have already chosen God as their portion ;—share with them the honor and blessedness of a pious and useful life; and go with them to inherit the eternal joys of heaven. Why should you defer coming to a decision on a subject which stands thus connected with your present and everlasting happiness ? Why linger and hesitate, when a crown of unfading glory is the prize set before you ? Do you find within you a reluctance to attend to the subject of religion ?—Is it an unpleasant subject,—one, on which you find it difficult to fix your affections and thoughts ? Ah, my friends, if it be so, you are in a *dreadful state of mind.* And has it never occurred to you, how that creature must appear in the sight of God, that cannot bear to think of his character and ways,—that can take no pleasure in his presence and service, and can be happy only in an utter unmindfulness of the Being who made him, and of the duties he requires of him ? One thing is plain,—*either God must change, or you must change, or you can never behold his face in peace.* You do not like to think on the subject of religion ! O how shocking ! What evidence too of estrangement from

the Father of your spirits, and of entire unfitness for heaven? But this subject *must* be thought of. It is in vain to think of always keeping it at a distance. You may put it off to day, and to morrow, and next day; but, as God is true, you cannot put it off always. It will come home sooner or later; it may come suddenly; and come, in circumstances, only to tell you that your term of probation is closed and your soul lost forever. The day of death will put an end to procrastination, and teach you, when it is too late to retrieve the loss, that the *care of the soul is the first and great concern of man.*

Here then I close. The service, which has been attempted for your good, I commend to the blessing of God, with earnest prayer, that, in the last, great day, it may be found not to have been in vain. For the coming of that day, may we all be prepared. It is as certain as the day of our death; and we are hastening towards it, fast as the wings of time can waft us. Another year of our short life is drawing to a close.* Its Sabbaths are now all gone by, and have borne to heaven,

* Delivered on the last Sabbath evening of the year.

their report, how we improved them. In a little time all our years will be gone, and we shall be numbered with the generations that have descended to the grave before us. We are the creatures of a day, passing through life as an arrow passes through the air ;—spirits come from God and going to God ; a few moments hence we disappear and are seen no more ; we drop into eternity and are swallowed up amidst its unchanging scenes. Whilst then, in view of these scenes, we press upon you the duties you owe to society, disclose the dangers which beset your path, enforce the importance of established principles and a high standard of character, we say, first of all, and more important than all,—Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.—Then will your life be a public blessing, and your end peace ; and when this material universe shall give place to new heavens, and a new earth, your names will appear in the book of life, and your spirits be united to the just made perfect before the throne of God.

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